DESIGN AND DESIGNER

IN CONTEMPORARY

BRITISH THEATRE PRODUCTION

BY

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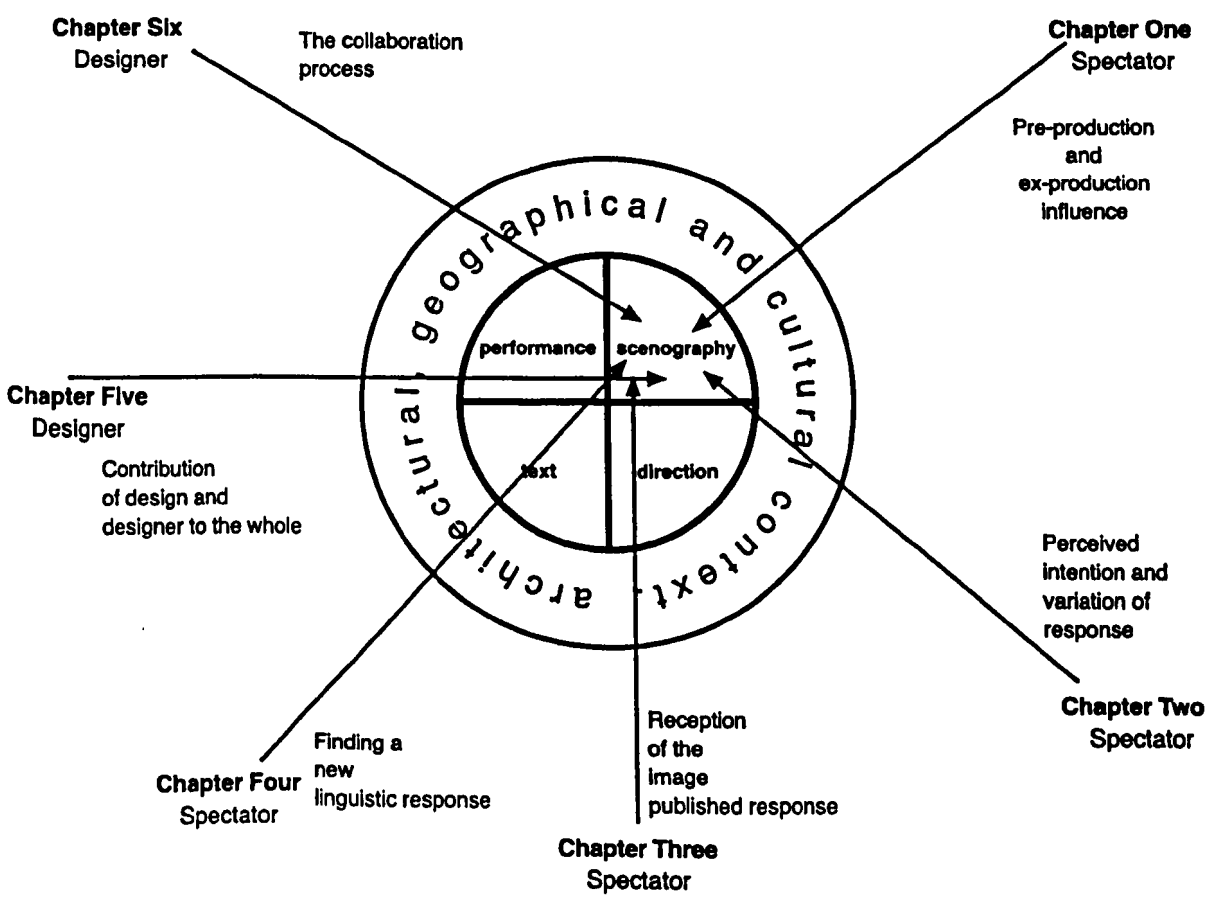
A thesis submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements of the degree of Ph.D.
The drama Department, Faculty of Arts. October 1999

ABSTRACT

The thesis is an interrogation of both process and reception of contemporary scenography. The definition 'contemporary' embraces professional public performance since 1980. Theatre design is now more accurately described as scenography, but as theatre designers in Britain rarely describe themselves as scenographers, both terms are adopted.

The thesis is divided into two sections followed by an appendix. Diagrammatically, we may see the performance product as central. The first section of the thesis – chapters one to four – reflects the process of image reception as a journey, situating the spectator as reader. In chapter one I examine the influence of pre-production visual material and the architectural context of the performance. Chapter two deconstructs the theory of intention as applicable to image. The aim of the third chapter is to point up the deficiencies and limitations of scenographic interpretation in published criticism. This leads, in chapter four, to the provision of an alternative methodology for accurate detailing of both process and intended effect by applying the terminology of classical rhetoric.

The perspective changes in the second half with designer as protagonist. Chapters five and six form a debate centred on material from the Appendix interviews. I examine contemporary scenographic theory as offered up by designers as practitioners and investigate the role and function of the theatre designer within the collaborative process of theatre production.



Dedicated to David, Henry, Tilly and Toby Parker
Who have tolerated time out plus.

This thesis is my own work. The views expressed are not those of the University,

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Transcripts made from (approx.) two-hour interviews with fifteen practitioners. The transcripts were sent to the interviewees for comment and editing. These are the edited versions. Each interview is preceded by a CV (since circa 1980) which creates its own narrative and illustrates the cross-fertilisation and interrelated patterns of working relationships within the field.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

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[1] Escher, M. **The Graphic Work of M.C. Escher.** Pan Books, London and Sydney,1972
[2] Production photograph.
[3] **Make Space!** S.B.T.D.1994.p.58
[4] Goodwin p.81
[5] Goodwin, p136
[6] Make Space! p.50
[7] ibid p.48
[8] Berkoff, Steven. **The Theatre of Steven Berkoff.** London. Methuen, 1992. pp.13-35
[9] Ptáčková, Vera. **A Mirror of World Theatre – Prague Quadrennial 1967-1991**.Prague Theatre Institute, 1995 pp.231,101,220
[10] ibid pp.218,226,230

Chapter 1

THE EFFECT OF PRE-PRODUCTION AND EX-PRODUCTION MATERIAL ON SCENOGRAPHIC READING.

HOUSE STYLE: **The Cherry Orchard.** Chekhov. The Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, RSC Oct. 1996 (Director, Adrian Noble, designer, Richard Hudson)
SOUND IMAGERY AND CONTEXT
COSTUME AND CONTEXT
FILTERED IMAGE: (NO) SET AND CONTEXT
OBJECTS AS IMAGE: FURNITURE AS SET
HOUSE AS SET
UNIFICATION OF CONTEXT AND CONTENT

If we chart the spectator's reception of a theatre production as a journey influenced first by marketing imagery such as brochure, flyer or poster, then by the geographic and cultural location of the performance space and then by its architecture, we can see that there is no innocent eye ready to read, uncoloured, what is offered up in the performance; no intellectual *tabula rasa* affected only by what is immediately impressed upon it.

Added to these effects on spectators' perception, by examining the architectural history and cultural objectives of The Swan Theatre, I will map out the development of 'house style' and its influence on the scenography of **The Cherry Orchard.**

Theatre designers find designing for The Swan difficult. David Fielding has designed both **Restoration**[1] and **The Plain Dealer**[2] there but he says:

> I wouldn't want to work in the Swan again. In fact I'd go so far as to say that I don't like the Swan. I find it uncomfortable to sit in, I don't like looking down on to the top of actors' heads, I find the sight lines and the blocking a problem and I hate the finish of the wood - it

[1]Edward Bond.The Swan Theatre. RSC Sept. 1988 Dir: Di Trevis
[2]William Wycherley. The Swan Theatre. RSC April 1988 Dir: Ron Daniels

reminds me of a vegetarian restaurant - Cranks probably - or a sauna. The theatre takes over and becomes the set.[3]

There certainly are practical problems, for example, no get-in door. The theatre architect Iain Mackintosh hints at a conspiracy theory - that the Swan, like

> ... the stages of Chichester, Sheffield and the Royal Exchange, were all originally intended to limit the designer. At Stratford-upon-Avon's Swan theatre, the RSC management deliberately omitted any sort of scenic get-in door, in the fond but doomed idea that thereby they could ban scenery from the Swan.[4]

What could also be perceived as a constraint is the position of the back wall no more than three metres behind the upstage limit of the performance space between the side galleries, but neither of these facts constitutes an argument for designer-proof theatre. What designers are in agreement about however is the manner in which The Swan Theatre auditorium imposes its own aesthetic. Even a designer such as Fran Thompson who is more familiar with working in the round or on thrust stages than Fielding, admits to finding the Swan Theatre difficult. Referring to her design for **Coriolanus**[5] set in the French Revolution, she says,

> The Swan Theatre is an exacting space. The dramatic strength of the building lies in its vertical height, the runaway of the stage and the proximity of the audience. These are elements I tried to exploit in an environmental design.[6]

What she actually produced was a representational, painted backcloth behind a false proscenium arch.

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[3]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 82
[4]Mackintosh, Iain. **Architecture, Actor and Audience.** Routledge, 1993, p. 99
[5]Shakespeare. The Swan Theatre RSC. May 1994 Dir: David Thacker
[6]S.P.T.D. **make SPACE!** Theatre Design Umbrella, 1994, p. 42

Kendra Ullyart's construction for **The Beggar's Opera** is a further illustration that the 'designer-proof' policy does not work. She deliberately subverted the benign mellow quality of the space in a realisation that was an antithesis to the style of Reardon's building. (We might bear in mind that Reardon is described as a 'practising conservation architect'[7] not specifically 'a theatre architect.') It was a significant statement as no Swan Theatre discourse distinguishes between the aesthetic of the performance space and the spectator space:

> Two balconies on insubstantial supports were built on to the thrust stage area, the extensions sagging dangerously. Makeshift staircases were lashed on with fraying rope. Sagging shelves full of old props were used to break up the clean lines of the galleries. The overall impression was of a theatre, built by the beggars themselves, which could collapse at any moment.[8]

If the design had been in a neutral space and had not been superimposed on a structure such as the wooden balconies of the Swan Theatre, the parodic, physically deconstructionist effect could not have been achieved. The transfer to the proscenium arch Barbican therefore required a completely different practical treatment to make the same ironic point. Here Ullyart's Barbican set resembled a crumbling, condemned proscenium arch opera house which housed elements of Ullyart's original wobbly galleries and precarious staircases thereby adding further interpretative strata. What had been theatre architecture-as-set (contemporary recreation of Jacobean Theatre) overlaid with set-as-parody (contemporary recreation of eighteenth-century underworld) now developed into Barbican-as-contemporary-shell containing a ruined

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[7]Mulryne, R and Shewring, M. **Making Space for Theatre**. Stratford-upon-Avon, 1995. p.25

[8] **Make Space!** P.40

version of high culture (eighteenth-century opera house). Within this box-within-a-box of contrived devastation was packed the original Swan Theatre parody:

> .... Still excited by the atmosphere of danger created with the Swan set, I designed a condemned opera house on stage. On its sunken floor and between its crumbling walls, the original set was recreated to span the opera house boxes and extend to the new 'proscenium arch'.[9]

Ultz emphasises the imposition of the Swan architecture in a different way. For the Theban Plays he felt there were several problems posed by the theatre space and that the solution was to accede to it rather than to fight it, to take advantage of what it offered visually and adapt what that might suggest. For example 'the Swan is wonderful as a court of law: the jury either side and the defence and prosecution in the centre.'[10]

Once the spectator accepts, as designers have done, that the Swan is not a neutral space, that in its undressed state its resonance is of some benevolent institution, whether it reminds [us] of a vegetarian restaurant [Fielding] or a law court, we are approaching the Noble/Hudson's starting point for **The Cherry Orchard.**

Six months into the run of **The Cherry Orchard** an 'In Conversation' interview was 'staged' between director Adrian Noble and Cambridge University theatre academic, Peter Holland.[11] Let us look at the context: Noble is sitting on the stage of **his** production, within a sense, **his** theatre (it was completed as he was being groomed for the role of Artistic Director) - talking to **his** audience (prior to an evening show): thus he is negotiating several roles simultaneously. In the course of the discussion, Noble referred so many times to the centrality of the *house* in his

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[9]ibid
[10]ibid p. 41
[11]24 January 1996. I am grateful to John Tulloch for the text of this interview for his paper. **Theatrical Performance and Discourse: 'Going to' high cultural texts.** This he delivered at the IFTRE/FIRT conference, Tel Aviv, 1996

interpretation of the text that it reached the point of obsession. Witness his self-contradictory response to Holland's quotation from Chekhov to Olga Knipper - that 'the part of Lopakhin is the central one...if it doesn't come off, the whole play will be a flop.' (This is territory Holland revisits twice more which suggests Holland's own agenda). Noble replied,

> Yes, that is definitely true, we are blessed in a fantastic performance from David Troughton here. But I suppose for me the central character is the house actually...

Later in the discussion Noble is plainly delighted when Holland appears to relinquish his Williams/Griffiths[12] positioning and enter Noble's less overtly political arena:

> Holland; I've never seen a production of Chekhov that made me so aware that I am in a theatre, in which the theatre becomes the house.... The Swan seems to lend itself perfectly to a space in which we are all living in the same house.
>
> Noble; I think it's fantastic you say that. That was one of the absolutely central reasons that we wanted to do the play. Because I think what this theatre does wonderfully is it enables the inner architecture, the

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[12]Raymond Williams, a former Cambridge colleague of Holland's. 'In the great realists there was no separation in kind between public and private facts, or between public and private experience.' (**Modern Tragedy**, 1996) See also Trevor Griffiths' version of **The Cherry Orchard** and **Platonov** where he points up 'the counter meanings and counter-intentions screaming out to be realised.' (preface to his version of **The Cherry Orchard**.) Holland, like both these writers, places Chekhov firmly in the social realist context. Holland's article, **The Director and the Playwright: Control over the means of Production**, is a good example of this school of realist analysis which, by implication, is at odds with Noble's interpretation of the Chekhov text. Holland argues that in theatre there is an inevitable deconstruction of the writer 'at least since the rise of the director, when the director as creator of performance-text replaces the writer as creator of the play-text.' (p. 215)

skeleton of the play to reveal itself. It tends to resist ...naturalism and realism.

Then a third time:

> The play...is about the house.... For me the centre of the play is the house and the emblem that the house develops into during the course of the evening.

Trevor Nunn originally conceived the The Swan Theatre as

> the venue for the presentation of a trove of neglected Elizabethan, Jacobean and Restoration plays, the building celebrates the seventeenth-century actor/audience relationship, with spectators crammed at three levels round a protruding tongue of stage.[13]

Nunn's 'crammed' and 'protruding tongue' popularises and accesses the image in contrast to Reardon's 'intention' to

> create a space for the performance of Elizabethan and Jacobean plays, not a facsimile of any playhouse of that period but one which would recapture their essential qualities....It was above all to be a space for the Theatre of the World in which visual illusion would play a secondary role.[14]

In his foreword to **At The Sign of the Swan,** Nunn invokes a dual moral imperative. By

> presenting a neglected repertoire from the very greatest period of English dramatic literature.... by seeing a Tudor play, an Elizabethan play, a Jacobean play and a Restoration play all on the same basic

[13]Mulryne and Shewring, p. 168
[14]ibid

stage ....we will see similarities of moral purpose in the relationship of dramatist to audience. [15]

The other moral prong of his argument for performing such 'neglected' texts is that RSC directors have a duty to posterity. They

have the literary and scholarship responsibility. If we do not do the work who is going to do them? If we do not proclaim their existence and celebrate the language in which they were written there is every possibility that by the time we go into the next century the opportunity to proclaim them will have gone.[16]

So when and by whom was it decided to produce on the stage of the Swan one of the most frequently performed 'classics' - a contemporary version (Peter Gill's), of a play written by a Russian in 1904?

Adrian Noble's agenda for the Swan differs from his predecessor's. Noble makes no reference to a specific repertoire and instead concentrates on the actor/spectator relationship - but not as a re-creation of seventeenth-century performance events:

The actor's presence seems to be in perfect balance with that of the audience. All successful productions acknowledge this easy relationship. The space humanises the epic, makes public the private; and enables a secret grief or joy to be shared honestly. [17]

The publication dates suggest that this last statement was made in the knowledge that Noble would shortly be directing **The Cherry Orchard** in the Swan. But this was not the first non-Jacobean or non-Restoration play to have been performed in this auditorium. Bond 's **Restoration** in 1986 was the first - presumably the title and

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[15] Cook, J. **At the Sign of the Swan.** Harrap, 1986. p.12
[16] ibid
[17] Mulryne and Shrewring, p. 168

subject matter gave it the required pseudo-historical pedigree - and by 1989 a new play was being performed at the Swan - Flannery's **Singer.**

It was Terry Hands who set the Swan-Chekhov agenda. His last production as an RSC Artistic Director was **The Seagull** (1990). Inevitably described as Hands' 'swan-song' in several national reviews, it was critically acclaimed and like its successor **The Cherry Orchard,** did good box office. According to the RSC marketing department 'there was no particular statement about a change of policy for what was performed at the Swan. It was just a slow drip-drip.' As Sian Sterling, the RSC marketing officer says in interview:

> Chekhov has always gone down well in the Swan. People just adore the atmosphere of the Swan. Sitting there and watching Chekhov is an extremely pleasurable experience. The sympathetic nature of the theatre itself endears itself to people and they want to watch that type of play, that intimate play about a family situation. It is a very sympathetic theatre to do that sort of production in. [18]

It has become apparent that what I am examining here is the relationship of the performance text to the whole theatre building and all that this particular theatre carries in its recent reconstruction. Scenography cannot be divorced from its siting in much the same way that we cannot divorce performance and audience. Susan Bennett develops this theory in her chapter *On the Threshold of Theatre* where she sets out to correct the fact that, with the exception of Arbor,[19] generally research has not looked to the reciprocal effects of architecture on the audience and their reception of the plays.... that these physical and perceptual relationships are central to the audience's experience of a performance. [20]

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[18] Sian Sterling interviewed by John Tulloch Jan. 1995. See also interview with Sterling re pre-production imagery. Appendix A, pp.165-170

[19] Arbor, Ann. **The Public and Performance: Essays in the History of French and German Theatre 1871-1900,** UMI Research Press, 1981

[20] Bennet,S.**Theatre Audiences. A Theory of Production and Reception.** Routledge,1990.pp136-37

Part of Michael Attenborough's explanation of why he chose to do **Pentecost** at the Other Place rather than at the Swan was that 'the personality of a theatre space is also to do with where it is sited. An audience makes a journey into the space. They have a sense of the world around the space.' [21] He points out how the banging on the door, break-in and violation of the sanctity of the church works in the Other Place because

> It's an isolated building. It's not in any sense protected.... If someone bangs on the door of the Swan, there's the RST collection, reading rooms, bookshops etc outside. There's a sense of being safe, with Stratford's Shakespearean heritage round you.[22]

Attenborough felt that the choice of The Other Place was the right one for **Pentecost** because of

> the Swan feel-good factor. The moment you walk through the door you feel good. The audience sits with, if not a literal, a metaphorical smile on their faces.[23]

In his **Essays on Performance Theory,** [24] Schechner's research into the relationship between social life, ritual and theatrical performance in the States has paved the way for more investigation in Britain, particularly at the high culture centres such as the Stratford-upon-Avon theatres. The anxiety of the journey, the one-way system, the parking and so on, prepares a spectator, once s/he has walked up the stone steps through the ecclesiastical door to indulge in the 'sense of being safe' and of sinking

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[21] Mulryne and Shewring, p.89
[22] ibid
[23] ibid
[24] **Essays on Performance Theory 1970-1976**. Richard Shechner, New York: Drama Book Specialists,1977, p. 105

gratefully into the aesthetic of the 'civilised', 'beautifully restored' interior of the Swan Front of House.

Before I look at the performance text itself and the audience reading of it, I will examine the pre-production influencing images that the spectator, albeit subliminally, will have absorbed.

By referring to 'classic texts', 'educational outreach' and more particularly, in relation to her views on the new 'In Conversation' marketing exercise, Sterling suggests that there is a requirement for the RSC marketing department to maintain and massage the clubbiness, and safe sense of belonging to the Cultural Establishment:

> I do believe that we're also there to communicate and relate better.... with our audience at different levels. It's a relationship as opposed to somebody just coming in and buying a ticket.[25]

'Members' pay to be on the mailing list thus getting 'priority' bookings. They are literally buying into a particular experience. There is exclusivity, an impression, almost, of being invited to a (house) party. When it was suggested that the set of pre-rehearsal images used in the brochures that had been used (a) to make the members feel comfortable and, therefore, (b) to sell the production, would also influence a reading of the performance text, Sterling replied:

> ...Yes, of course. But there is a huge difference in that if you are selling a bottle of beer through a television ad., you're using art to make that product interesting, whereas the RSC is an artistic organization in the first place. What I aim to do is to give an impression or foretaste of the artistic experience to come.[26]

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[25] Tulloch interview.
[26] See Appendix A p.167

Thus 'art' is used to sell 'art', despite the fact that the 'artist' - here a painter working in New York three months before rehearsals begin - has virtually no knowledge of even the direction that the production might take:

> The biggest problem is logistical. We have to work a long way ahead of the productions and when we are putting the leaflet together, we have very little to go on. We certainly don't know what the designs are - for example, what period anything is going to be set in, we often don't know all of the cast and the full creative team hasn't been assembled by then. I don't think we've ever gone to print with no director but it's come pretty close to that. All these factors have to be included in the brief that we give to the artist. To tell an artist to be as vague and as abstract as possible is a very difficult brief.[27]

What emerged, as the first marketing image was a painter's image of trees juxtaposed with Sterling's words - 'axes ready to swing through the cherry orchards of Russia'. The potential RSC theatre goers have already had history (and thus a reading of the text) interpreted for them through the image of nostalgic natural beauty soon to be violated by brutish Communism.

Once the production had been established as a critical and box-office success, a more informed brochure (in terms of what the production was 'about') was printed. The primary images here were those of the two 'stars' - Penelope Wilton and Alec McCowen.

> Wilton is shown full-page, in close-up, serious, eyes ringed with experience and care, the white dress suggesting beauty and elegance threatened. McCowen is shown more distantly, sitting on one end of his bench, again distinguished in his white suit, but also marginalised

[27]ibid p.165

and - like Wilton - against an empty black backcloth that emphasises their lack of lifeworld context.[28]

That the production was somehow 'missing' from the 1996 RSC Barbican season (in fact Penelope Wilton was committed elsewhere) reinforced the 'welcome return home' to The Swan in Stratford, where the theatre becomes the house.[29]The limited number of performances 'sold out almost immediately' (Sterling) which further enhanced the sense of privilege enjoyed by a potential spectator who had actually managed to buy a ticket. For this rare and celebrated homecoming, the marketing image was a production photograph placed right at the end of the brochure - apart from Clare Park's highly sensual photographs of intertwining naked bodies, the corporate image for the new season. **The Cherry Orchard** was not fully a part of that season but an added extra, with the weight and seniority of a successful, but carefully limited, run behind it. The chosen image for the returning favourite itself capitalised on a separation and a sense of aloofness by capturing a particular point in Act Two:

> Lopakhin: You really must decide. After all it's a simple question. Will you lease the land for villas or won't you? Yes or no? One word. That's all I'm asking of you. Yes or no?
>
> Ranevskaya: Who's been smoking such disgusting cigars here? (Sits)
>
> Gaev: It really is convenient of them to have built the railway here. (Sits down.) Here we are. Lunch in town and home already. I pot the red into the middle pocket. I feel like going indoors for a game now. [30]

Not only does it point up the essence of Chekhov - misfiring communication (they are all facing in different directions), but the photograph crystallises the exclusivity of

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[28] Tulloch
[29] ibid
[30] Chekhov. **The Cherry Orchard**. Version by Peter Gill from the literal translation by Ted Braun. Oberon Books. London. 1995. p. 37

this particular home and its grounds. Lopakhin's desperate attempt at engagement expressed by his clumsy leaning into the private domain of Gaev and his sister's 'owned' park bench emphasises the inability of a peasant to inhabit their world. The elegant wrinkling of Wilton's nose to express her distaste for the smell privatises the public space. As the visible curl of Yasha's cigar smoke spreads its olfactory evocation of the leisured classes through the audience, thus exploiting every sense to 'invite them in'. Ranevskaya indicates that 'her' fresh air has been contaminated by a servant's inappropriate abuse of it. Gaev, staring into the distance/audience, a mild smile on his face, is happy to be 'home already', the place where he can inhabit the nostalgic twilight of his nursery and his billiard room.

Because the RSC is to be 'playing away', (November 1996 to January 1997) the most recent marketing image used in the broadsheet newspapers to advertise the transfer to the Albery Theatre highlights a different aspect of this particular production which further indicates Noble's Naturalist/Stanislavskian as opposed to Realist/Griffiths interpretation of the text. Rather than stressing a comfortable material ownership of place, by now associated with The Swan Theatre itself, what is suggested is a disturbing fear of the future. A seated Ranevskaya flanked by her daughters dominates the tableau. Lopakhin is sitting on the ground below them while Gaev is standing in the distance. All are caught in the act of listening. Initially, the effect of the elegant, white period costumes is to place the image in the genre of the assured-but-relaxed, informal outdoor 'snap', but like the earlier production photograph cited, it is actually charged with marketing and political messages. There is the clear class demarcation with Lopakhin sitting awkwardly on the ground, Ranevskaya seated on furniture, slightly in front of, yet protected by, her daughters, while Gaev looms above them all, dominant in class and gender, but vacant in expression. The moment is actually in Act Two when they (and the audience, in this production) hear the sound:

...suddenly in the distance a sound is heard as if it were coming from the sky. The sound of a string breaking and dying away sadly.

Ranevskaya: What was that?

Lopakhin: A cable in one of the mines must have snapped. But it must have been a long way off.

Gaev: Or it could have been a bird. A heron perhaps .

Trofimov: Or an owl.

Ranevskaya: (*Shudders)* I didn't like it. It was horrible. It was frightening. *A pause*

Firs: It was just the same before the great disaster. An owl hooted and the samovar was singing.

Gaev: What disaster?

Firs: Freedom.[31]

Thus the announcement of transferring to the West End is celebrated by a transforming moment - a moment of premonitory fear for the violent transference of power from the upper classes which has its echoes in the past.

If the mailing list, pre-rehearsal brochure imagery is the first visually directed reading then the production photographs are the second. In common with most 'production' photographs, they were contrived to reproduce a moment in the

[31] Gill Version. P. 46

production but were actually posed for separately, thus exaggerating the tableau effect - the significant frozen moment. For the West End transfer, authenticity is reinforced by the text - short quotes such as 'Adrian Noble's glorious production' (**The Independent**) and then, below the photograph, 'Must end' followed by, 'This is the best Chekhov I have ever seen' (**The Sunday Times**). Thus the picture is vertically framed by 'glorious' and 'best' - both quotations from the theatre reviews of two 'quality' broad sheets. The quotation from **The Independent** is, in fact, the opening sentence of Paul Taylor's review - although, bearing in mind the location, there appears to be an intentional irony in the second half of the statement, 'Adrian Noble's glorious production of **The Cherry Orchard** lets you see the wood for the trees', particularly as he continues, 'Richard Hudson's set [is] the boards of the Swan's largely bare thrust stage.'

The Sunday Times quote might have been part of a paragraph in a theatre round up later in the season (if such a thing exists, the library for the RSC has not located it), but it certainly was no part of Robert Hewison's theatre review in **The Sunday Times** on the 9th July 1995 which begins

> Noble's **The Cherry Orchard** will please because it has those two deadly English virtues, style and charm. Much of the style comes from the decision to play 19th century Russian naturalism on a 17th century Jacobean stage.

and ends,

> ...somewhere some darker ironies have been lost, some ambiguities ironed out, some pain avoided in the pursuit of pleasure.

HOUSE STYLE

What emerges from this production of **The Cherry Orchard** is a unique *house* style entirely connected to and coming from Noble's noted affectionate relationship with the Swan Theatre as house and, by extension, with the house as audience. As Holland remarked, 'we have seen how the Swan seems to lend itself perfectly to a space in which we are all living in the same house' and how Noble, rather than addressing this comment directly, adds 'I think what this theatre does wonderfully is it enables the inner architecture, the skeleton of the play to reveal itself.' [32] Thus Noble attaches another reading of the building's structure. He elided an extended metaphor by comparing the various applications of wood in the theatre architecture - slats, planks, pillars, stairs etc - to both the shape of the human skeleton and to the naked, 'revealed' form of the text.

The welcome extended by the band to the 'house' builds on what Attenborough described as the 'feel-good factor' of the Swan interior. By informalising the formal start of the show (the dance band tuning up), the musicians provide a relaxed ambient sound, thus anticipating the intertextuality of the space as an arena for entertainment - the ballroom. The majority of the audience will be familiar enough with the play to congratulate themselves on their recognition of the 'Jewish band' from Act 3. So here we have the audience invited to Ranevkya's ball in her house and because, to arrive at a country house you go through the grounds, the audience, by topological extension, has subconsciously made the imaginative journey through the cherry orchard; (the literal translation of the play's title is cherry *garden.*) Off-stage is as significant as on-stage. As Levy points out,

> Chekhov's characters enter and exit the stage frequently, thus drawing the audience's attention not only to what they are doing on-stage, but no less so to their offstage whereabouts.....the main motivations for the

[32] Tulloch

plot in Chekhov's plays are often offstage. The fire in **The Three Sisters** is an offstage realisation of an on stage metaphor.[33]

The audience has literally participated in an off-stage journey.

SOUND IMAGERY AND CONTEXT

Sound–scape is an undeveloped aspect of scenography. This production provides a clear example of conscious exploitation of context in order to layer the effect.

On the archive video recording of the production, while the audience assembles the screen is blank for the first ten minutes, so the ambient sound of animated chatter combined with the band tuning up or playing snatches of dance pieces, is prioritised. This heralds the relationship between literal or naturalistic off-stage sound (trains arriving, axes on wood) and expressive on-stage music. The temporal physical and sound barriers between seating an audience and 'curtain up' (in this case a gauze) are bridged by this contrived informality. The sound of the band is the first scenographic component to be absorbed by the audience. It immediately de-naturalises the production - there is no physical requirement for a band until the ball in Act Three - and places the production in a particular stylistic realm of its own. Noble suspends the performance text somewhere between a Stanislavskian naturalism and a metonymic minimalism. The Jewish band spans the two. The train noises, dogs barking, horses' hooves, birds twittering in this production, while not in the realm of Gunter's on-stage train in **Wild Honey,**[34] come close to the frogs and corncrakes that Chekhov famously objected to in the original Moscow Arts' production. The Jewish band is specified in the text and, together with the 'string breaking' and 'the sound of

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[33] Levy, Shimon. IFTR/FIRT Scenography Group paper. Prague, 1995

[34] **Wild Honey.** Chekhov. Adapted by Michael Frayn from **Platanov**. RNT,1984.Dir: Morahan, Set:John Gunter,Costumes: Deirdre Clancy

an axe striking a tree', combines the function of stage direction integrated into the narrative by acknowledgement from the characters[35] and of sound effects formulated to elicit unease. In the following extract from Act Two, at the end of Ranevskaya's melodramatic speech about her cruel lover in Paris, we see the multi-function of the band and how it is woven into the narrative without being specified as a stage direction:

> RANEVSKAYA: ...(*Wipes away her tears)* God have mercy on me. Don't punish me any more. (*Takes a telegram from her pocket.*) This came from Paris today. He asks for forgiveness and begs me to return. (*Tears it up*) Is that music I hear?
>
> GAEV: It's the Jewish band. Don't you remember it? Four violins, a flute and a double bass.
>
> LOPAKHIN: (*Listens.*) I can't hear anything. (*Hums softly. Quietly laughs.*) I saw such a good play yesterday. Really amusing.
>
> RANEVSKAYA: I'm sure it isn't at all amusing. Instead of going to the theatre you should take a look at yourselves first. See what dreary lives you all lead and what nonsense you talk.

The context presents a clear choice. Music or no music? Is Ranevskaya in her heightened, near hysterical state imagining the sound of a dance band? They are in the middle of the open countryside after all. Does Gaev humour her in order to move her on from the subject of her embarrassing past, painting in detail as he does repeatedly when unpleasant reality leaks into his nursery world and he envisages his fantasy billiard games? Is Ranevskaya's change of mood a result of being brought down to

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[35] This comes close to the distinction made by Ingarden between *haupttext* and *nebentext* (Ingarden, R. **The Literary Work of Art**, North Western University Press,1973, p.208) developed by Aston and Savona, (chapter 5). The relationship between stage direction and *dialogue* is different but comparable to that between stage direction and *scenography.*

earth by Lopakhin's literal reaction to her emotional/psychological 'music'? i.e. he refuses to join in the game and imagine or 'hear' music? Or is there actual music audible to the audience, which Lopakhin, if he is a character without artistic sensibility, cannot tune into? (This hangs on whether or not Trofimov's remark about Lopakhin having the hands of an artist is played as ironic or sincere.) Or does he hear it, but refuse to acknowledge it and go so far as to mask it by his own humming?

In this production Noble and Stephen Warbeck, the music director, make a neat compromise. The audience hears the merest waft of music - little more than an audio-sketch of the instruments mentioned by Gaev. Ranevskaya and Gaev appear to hear it. Lopakhin does not.

The scripted sound - the 'string breaking', the axe and the Jewish band - belong to a non-literal landscape of imagined fears and prescience whereas the ambient effects interpolated by Noble constitute a physical environmental sound picture within the here-and-now of the house - a safe house of domestic detail - and beyond that place behind the backs of the audience where, as expressed by performative deixis, the cherry orchard lies. (Sometimes the performers literally point over the heads of the stalls audience to the 'beyond' area.) It is as though these literal sound effects, such as the pronounced squeak of Epihodov's shoes, are emphasised in order to satisfy a perceived requirement from a Chekhov-viewing audience for familiar reference points that will make them feel safe and comfortable. The ease on the ear is reinforced by the ease on the eye. The elegance of the performance style and the opulent costumes, like the sound, will facilitate the journey of the spectator into less familiar territory - the more problematic minimalism of the set, or lack of set. As the gauze cage/veil is flown up to indicate the conventional start of the show, the snatches of dance band tunes develop into a more abstract sound collage - the visual and the aural journey are coterminous. A steam train sound with its faint whistle fades into the 'string breaking', effectively combining the function of sound and music. The collage acts as both foreshadowing and mood-setting agent. The hospitable jollity is

transformed by all the scenographic components - lighting, set and sound - into an atmosphere of abandoned, cold space.

The band has two other functions. One is generic. With a live band to 'play in the show', the genre of the piece is edged towards the musical - more specifically the musical comedy. The opening sound picture could be described as an FX overture or Sounds From the Show. This is not to suggest that an audience will expect Lopakhin to burst into song, but there might well be a collective unconscious memory of **Two Gentlemen of Verona** at the Swan.[36] whose on-stage band and crooner were placed in the same strong upstage position as the Jewish band. In the Thacker production, scenes were interspersed with Cole Porter numbers, thereby establishing a tone and mood of 1930s 'light comedy' genre. The band was thus promoted to a more dominant role than merely setting the period. It shifted the genre.

The other function of the band is socio-political. There is no explanation, either on or off-text, why the band is specifically Jewish. The only descriptive reference, apart from the one analysed above, is via the stage directions at the beginning of the act - *'The Jewish band can be heard playing in the hall.'* The other stage direction, *'Ranevskaya hums a lezginka'* is confusing because the *lezginka* is actually a dance of the Lezghins who are a Mohammedan tribe from Persia. There are no racial characteristics attributed to them in the text. The fragmented dialogue suggests that the band is there to exemplify further Ranevskaya's extravagant foreign tastes in which she indulges as a distraction from the unpalatable reality of her present domestic, financial crisis:

Ranevskaya hums a lezginka

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[36]Shakespeare. The Swan Theatre. April, 1991. Dir: David Thacker, Des: Sheelagh Keegan. Musical director: Guy Wolfenden. A significant percentage of the audience at the Swan are 'returners'. See interview with Sian Sterling, Appendix A, p.169

RANEVSKAYA: Why is Leonid so late? What's he doing in town till this time? *(To Dunyasha.)* Offer the musicians some tea.

TROFIMOV: Perhaps they didn't hold the auction after all.

RANEVSKAYA: It was a mistake to hire a band and give a party. Well I can't help it. *(Sits down and hums softly.)*

Noble chooses to specify the Jewishness of the band costumically with the metonymic *yarmulke* (black skull cap), rhythmically (the beat is reminiscent of bar mitzvah dancing) and musically (the inclusion of the dulcimer) emphatically placing it outside the cultural context of the late nineteenth-century Russian landowning class. Because they are performers, the musicians are tolerated - performers are traditionally roving and rootless. As a performer of tricks, even Charlotte, 'taken in' as the family governess, is a stranger:

CHARLOTTE: I don't have proper papers and I don't know how old I am.... My mother and father used to travel round fairgrounds giving performances. .... when my mother and father died a German lady took me in and educated me and when I grew up I became a governess but where I came from and who I am I don't know. (Act Two)

Thus the band points up the xenophobia of this dying bourgeois existence. The members of the band are benevolently perceived because although they are outsiders, their intrusion is controlled. They have been hired as a foreign fashion accessory by Ranevskaya. This is in marked contrast to Chekhov's placing of the other outsider, the 'wayfarer', who surprises and frightens the garden gathering at the end of Act Two. The casual grouping of the social occasion is immediately transformed into a defensive battle line. The way in which the members of this class react in horror to the strange, dark and dirty, poetry-reciting refugee-cum-war-veteran highlights their

mistrust and ignorance of the changing world outside the nursery and the cherry orchard. This is a world of social and political upheaval hinted at by Lopakhin's solution to the family's financial crisis - to access the cherry orchard to summer visitors. The family response is predictable. The safety seal of the estate would be broken:

> RANEVSKAYA: Oh dear. Villas and all those *people*. It seems so vulgar. Does that sound awful?
>
> GAEV: It does not. I quite agree with you.

At the beginning of Act Three, the band's subdued diminished intervals fill the space; thus reversing the mood change here at the ball from the mood change at the opening of the play. Matching the behaviour of Ranevkaya and her guests, the music becomes increasingly frantic. The Jewish band finally counterpoints not only the emotional turmoil of the dancers but their physical movement as well, as the musicians break the upstage frame and snake wildly on and off stage. The band assumes a corporately mischievous character as it deliberately drowns out the stationmaster's poetry recital and the musicians laugh at the antics of Yasha and Epihodov. Like a guilty child it is subdued by the return of Gaev and Lopakhin and the aural space is filled with near-silence only broken by the distant sounds of a billiards game. This is a neat mirroring of the passage noted earlier in Act Two where Ranevskaya's mood alters as she hears what Gaev identifies as the Jewish band. Here, for the first and only time, the billiard game is an offstage actuality rather than an on-stage picture in Gaev's head:

> GAEV: (*Weeping to FIRS.*)...Oh what a day. If only you knew what I have been through.

The sound of billiards from the billiard room. Yasha's voice. 'Seventeen and eighteen.' GAEV's expression changes. He stops weeping.

GAEV: I'm tired. Come on Firs. I want to change.

From this point to the end of the act, the 'change' is played out. As he relates how he became the owner of the cherry orchard, Lopakhin takes possession, first of the keys to the house and then of the band - comparing their music with the sound of the axe cutting down the orchard. As he *'jingles the keys'*, David Troughton's drunken Lopakhin shouts about playing, hearing and listening:

> ...Musicians play something. Do you hear me? I want to hear you play something. I invite you all to come and see Yermolai Aleyevich take an axe to the cherry orchard.....You should have listened to me. Why didn't you listen to me?..... Play up, play up. I'm the master now.

The final sight and sound that the audience has of the musicians is of them following the exiting players downstage. The band pauses in a dim circle of light, still playing amidst the applause. Pragmatically, the music masks the furniture moving for the next act; symbolically, it plays out the Andreyev régime.

COSTUME AND CONTEXT

The colours and shades of the costumes suggest tamed nature, elegance and elegy. *Eau de nil* is the dominant shade. The arrival of Ranevskaya is trumpeted in such a way to lead the spectator to expect an explosion of colour, but her expensively tailored travelling costume is not red but maroon with fur trimmings. The dominant

shade is a bleached-out colour. The dresses Ranevskaya wears throughout the play signal the restrained taste of the class that she and Gaev occupy. Like his sister, Gaev dresses in a combination of creams, whites and beiges. Act Two is a parade of colour semiotics. The servant Dunyasha, dressed in bright colours, tries to impress Yasha - also a servant but one in thrall to Paris fashion, so in muted colours. Lopakhin expresses his social aspiration by wearing white for their stroll in the country. Anya and Varya enter wearing shades of near-white thus enlarging the sepia photograph effect that could be titled **Landowning Class at Leisure, 1904.**[37] It is into this frame that the 'wayfarer' strays. It is his appearance, i.e. what he wears, that is as threatening as who he might be and what he might be doing there. Their wrinkled noses of disgust are as much at the sight of his dusty black rags as at his intrusion on their privacy. Like Pip in Dickens' **Great Expectations** whose terror of the convict in the graveyard is based on the stranger's appearance; 'A fearful man, all in coarse grey, a man with no hat and with broken shoes, and with an old rag tied round his head', it is the break with sartorial convention, with the rigid dress code of the turn of the century which is the clearest indicator of egregiousness. Unless a person is properly attired for the particular occasion in costume of the correct cut and colour, be it shooting or supper, s/he becomes a social pariah.

Reviewers of this production tended to make much of the admirably executed 'authentic' costumes: ('Miss Wilton, exquisitely gowned...' [38]), which once again raises the issue of literalism versus representation or what Herbert described as 'the difference between reproducing the real thing and giving a poetic indication of it'.[39] Why did Hudson make the decision to combine the literal and the metonymic in one

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[37] Stevenson, P. **Edwardian Fashion,** Ian Allen 1980, p. 48
[38] Tinker, Jack. **The Daily Mail,** 5 June 1996
[39] Herbert, J. **A Theatre Workshop.**Art Books International. London. 1993, p.62

scenographic realisation? What there is of set design is understated, symbolic and polysemic whereas the costumes are historically accurate, elegant and obvious - arguably 'possessing those two deadly English virtues, style and charm.'[40] The costumes, as the sound and lighting do in this production, root the action in a recognisable area and era. Dress in any of the Chekhov productions referred to has resisted deconstruction. Even Brook, who casts against type in his international company where 'blacks play whites and young play old', feels that 'there are degrees of obligation, correspondence and in physique in Chekhov.' Apart from the argument that body-constraining corsets and bustles are necessary for the authentic body-language of female actors, it is not clear where the 'obligation' comes from, apart from the pleasure an RSC audience apparently derives from seeing extravagant 'period' dress modelled on stage.[41] Such costume that requires no imaginative collusion or decoding places the production in the category of Merchant-Ivory films or BBC costume drama.

It is through Hudson's wit and in his subversion of the deadly conventional that there is an indication of a subtler costumic representation. Yasha may accurately be aping his social superiors in his dress, but his hair is comically over greased. Lopakhin may wear white but the fit of his clothes express his failure to 'fit in'. They are slightly too tight and attention is drawn to this awkward fact when he is forced, as noted, to sit on the ground. Santini speaks of the 'psychological exploration of character' necessary in costume design,[42] and Deirdre Clancy stresses the subtlety of such characterisation and how, although the language of clothes might be imagined to

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[40] Hewison, Robert. **The Sunday Times**. Review, 9 July, 1995
[41] See Appendix B, pp.185,186
[42] Appendix A, p.155

be a common vocabulary, details such as 'a jacket being a bit wristy' go unnoticed 'except by other designers' or are assumed to be a mistake.[43]

Hats, in this production are particularly strong indicators and more than appropriate accessories. In Act Two, Ranevskaya's extravagant, presumably Parisian, confection, Gaev's stylish panama, which has 'seen better days', and Lopakhin's bowler, which is both wrong for the occasion and ill fitting, are all clear visual character signposts telling their story individually and collectively before a word of dialogue is spoken. A similar comic and telling moment is when Firs, guardian of Gaev's wardrobe, finally catches up with his master:

Enter Firs with an overcoat.

FIRS: *(To GAEV)* Put this on, will you sir?

GAEV: (*Puts on coat*) You're so boring, Firs.

FIRS: Going off this morning without telling me. It's not good enough.

In this production, the coat Firs actually drapes round Gaev's shoulders is ludicrously thin and will plainly be of no practical benefit. His pathetically limping and breathless effort to reach Gaev is in order to rebuke him, not for any practical reason, not because Gaev will catch cold, but because Gaev has excluded Firs, his manservant from the one rôle that has always been his. It is a rôle that in these anxious changing times, he hangs on to, that of dressing (up) his master. The gesture further infantilises Gaev and simultaneously points up the vicious snobbery he exhibits to servants elsewhere in the text; (*looks at YASHA* . 'I can smell herrings.')

[43]Appendix A, p. 37

FILTERED IMAGE: (NO) SET AND CONTEXT

The pre-set, four-sided gauze 'box' is an ironic comment on what the thrust stage at the Swan cannot accommodate - the box set. Designers at The Moscow Art Theatre such as Korovine, Golovine and Simov, who designed the original production of **The Cherry Orchard** directed by Stanislavsky in 1904, epitomised the Naturalistic school of Stanislavsky with their 'fourth wall' realisation of texts:

> ....descriptive truth was not enough. The stage had to become a place one could live in; and the décor had to be a space in which the actor could perform as if he were not being observed by the spectators. The stage, as Antoine[44] stated, is a 'closed space in which something happens.' and Jean Julien added 'The curtain must function like a fourth wall, that is transparent for the public and opaque for the actor.' In other words, the audience was meant to look at the play as if through a keyhole while the actors played out the drama as though it were a slice of real life.[45].

Both Antoine and Stanislavsky were concerned with presenting individuals in a cultural setting that was recognisable and identifiable, but their concern for authenticity led to a tendency to confuse the object with its representation, or the signifier with the signified. The other problem was that there was an inevitable mismatch of styles between interior and exterior scenes. The interiors were filled with authentic hand props and furniture often borrowed from country houses, whereas the exteriors were invariably represented by painted backdrops and two-dimensional trees. As Bablet points out, such cluttered photographic reproduction, 'free of

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[44]Bablet, Denis, **The Revolutions of Stage Design in the 20th Century**. Amiel, New York, 1977, p. 18. André Antoine's concern for authenticity led him to use pine imported from Norway to construct the garret in his production of Ibsen's **The Wild Duck** (Paris Theatre, 1906)

[45]ibid, p. 18

synthesis or selection, implicitly rejected the collaboration of the viewers intelligence and imagination'.

> Never had there been...such a radical separation between the play and the audience; and never had the proscenium arch defined such a sharp barrier between the stage platform and the auditorium. Realism had attained the highest degree of illusionist perfection.[46]

Hudson's gauze cube is the antithesis of naturalistic illusionism, and the explanation is both practical and aesthetic. Any box, unless transparent as his was, would create impossible sightlines and a false proscenium would work against the purpose of the Swan as a reconstructed Jacobean thrust stage. As David Fielding pointed out, at the Swan, 'the theatre takes over and becomes the set', so Richard Hudson eschewed 'set' in the sense of any imposed, space-impeding construction.

Thus the scenographic components are stylistically divided. We have shown how in this production the sound operates as a medium of heightened realism - the travelling stereo effects providing a technologically advanced Stanislavskian literalism - whereas the set as construction exists only as a semi-substantial sketch. The gauze is literally suspended - in readiness to be flown out once the space is animated. It is an image rich in associations and all of the readings are appropriate.

Noble's production emphasises the contrasting notions of being rooted and uprooted. Except Yasha, the servants are rooted, whereas Ranevskya and her entourage are on the move - arriving with a huge amount of luggage and departing with even more. Unpacking and packing is a necessary ritual in Ranevskaya's life.[47]

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[46]ibid, p. 20

[47]Libor Fára pushed the metaphor even further in the Czeck production of 1968 directed by Jan Kacer: (Cinoherni Klub, Praha) She 'overturned what had been until that time, the familiar nostalgic model of the blossoming trees, to provide an image of the grotesque in the shape of several small tree trunks with their roots packaged up as if ready for transport.' (Vera Ptácková, **A Mirror of World Theatre. The Prague Quadrennial 1967-1991**, Theatre Institute, Prague, 1995, p. 210)

The nearest to what could be described as a set (in the sense of construction) is the wall of suitcases built up at the beginning of Act Four which, as a comically hyperbolic statement, is a visual expression of Ranevskaya's character. The opening dialogue is accompanied by the act of unpacking or unwrapping. The gauze is flown out to reveal more fully a second layer of concealment - a pile of furniture covered with dustsheets. There is the sense of abandonment - this part of the house is obviously uninhabited and mummified, but also one of anticipation. What is under the wrapping?

There is an erotic excitement associated with drapes of semi-transparent, soft, floating material - with the half revealed. Lopakhin's relationship with Ranevskaya is never fully opened up, but it is characterised by comments such as 'I don't want to go, I'd rather stay and look at you. ...You're as lovely as ever.' (Act One) Lopakhin deals with his excited anticipation of Ranevskaya's arrival by wrapping himself up. What was hidden and indistinct is revealed when Lopakhin makes his surprise 'entrance' struggling out from under the covers, animating the shrouded mound. He had taken refuge by creeping under the nursery dustsheets to fall asleep in foetal safety.

The gauze suggests mystery in another sense - that of lifting the veil. This act simultaneously carries the religious/ritual sense of consummation following the removal of the bridal veil and the connotation of women wearing veils attached to exotic hats as an alluring fashion item. In this production the spectator is invited to look through the hazy, softened version of 'reality' that reflects the subjective point of view of Ranevskaya and Gaev with their fashionable elegance and their 'drawing a veil' over unpleasant facts.

Filtered, selective memory or nostalgia and its effect on the present , both personal and political, comprise the *textual* fabric of **The Cherry Orchard**. Gauze is its physical *textural* representation. The spectator has an indistinct directed glimpse into what might be or might have been. Lopakhin opens the play not with

straightforward background details to fill in the narrative, but with selected memories woven to colour the present and the imminent:

> LOPAKHIN: ...I wonder if she's changed at all. Wonderful woman...I remember my father ... beat me for something. Liuba Andreyevna, she was only a little girl herself, brought me into the nursery as it was then and washed my face for me. 'Never mind little peasant,' she said, 'it'll be better before your wedding day.'

Ranevskaya is now a 'wonderful woman' but he remembers her when she was only a little girl. Lopakhin's memory of this particular event, as she led him into the sanctuary of the nursery and bathed his wounds, invests her with a Mary Magdalene quality but he does not recall what it was his father beat him for. The gauze as opaque barrier between past and present - as screened memory - has a personal application with the prognostication that his wounds will heal 'before your wedding day'. Lopakhin's inability and/or disinclination to propose marriage to Ranevskaya's daughter implies that his wounds will never heal.

Socio-political order is about to change - as Trofimov says 'Mankind is marching forward.'[48] Ranevskaya calling Lopakhin a peasant was what he recalls more clearly than anything else she said at that time. Lopakhin repeats it three times and brings it into the present - 'I'm still a peasant'.) His final gesture at the close of the play as a new member of the bourgeoisie, the new order now owning 'the very land where my father and grandfather were slaves' (Act Three), is to echo the Gaev-Firs, master- servant, landlord-peasant relationship:

> GAEV: *(Dejectedly)* Cannon and into the pocket....I'll be quiet.

[48]Gill Version. Act 11. p.44

TROFIMOV: Time we went ladies and gentleman. (sic)[49]

LOPAKHIN: Epihedov. My coat.

The 1987 Prague Quadrennial had as its thematic section 'The Productions of the plays of A.P. Chekhov', and although Ptáková does not point it out in her introduction to that chapter, the scenography represented by photographs of performances, of models and of drawings is dominated by varied workings of screens and gauzes. Most notable is the performance area as a giant billiard table, with one and a half sides surrounded by a gauze screen. This was the model of the Belgian designer Jaques Berwouts (**The Cherry Orchard,** Antigone, 1987, dir; J. Gevers.)[50] The Soviet, Valery Levental reversed inside-outside in his design. The exterior 'cherry garden' doubled as graveyard (the headstone and Russian Orthodox cross are presumably commemorating Ranevskaya's dead son) and was boxed in by the walls of the nursery. The upstage flat is dominated by giant representations of formal family groupings and the side flats are composed of disproportionately huge windows with curtains of thin, torn gauze or muslin tempestuously blown back into the room. The psychological and political relationship between inner and outer world is a far stormier one than in his 1975 design which also encased the outdoors with the interior, but here both the pelmet above the proscenium opening and the drapes on either side, downstage of the proscenium, express an ordered formality.[51] The earlier design lacks the prefiguring of the violence of revolution in its literal sense of 'turning around'.

Brook combined rather than reversed the inside-outside in his 1981 production:

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[49] The implication is that Gaev is the gentleman, Lopakhin is not.
[50]Ptácková, p. 231. See Appendix, C, p.198
[51]ibid, p. 220. See Appendix C, p. 199
Compare this 1980 production (at Toen Theatre Tokyo, dir; A. Efros) with the 1975 version (Teatr dramy i komediina Taganke Moskva) with the same director. p. 101. See Appendix C, p. 200

> Against the peeling walls, shabby proscenium and undecorated balconies of the Bouffes (du Nord) were set some splendid Persian carpets ...In the second act a carpet was rolled up to suggest a fallen tree for the governess to balance on. The carpets were rolled up just before the family is forced to leave the estate at the end of Act IV.[52]

Even in a production as stripped as Brook's which 'aimed for directness and simplicity.... consciously trying to avoid any poetic charm'[53], semi-transparent screens were used in the third act to mask the up-stage party so one only had the occasional glimpse of the dancers rotating in the far distance...The most breathtaking moment came at the climax of the scene as Lopakhin staggered into the screens and knocked them down (in the text he knocks into a small table): the dance suddenly stopped and a very private scene had become embarrassingly public.[54]

The Three Sisters explores emotional territory similar to that of **The Cherry Orchard**, as Timothy O'Brien indicates when he describes his set for that play:

> We presented the characters on a chamber scale acting area, but we needed more. The famous yearning of the sisters for Moscow is a pipedream about the past; their call to each other to go on living is about going into a different future and the overcoming of death.[55]

Depending on the lighting, gauze can soften, blur or obscure. Mart Kitayev, also a Soviet, provided a design for **The Three Sisters** which, on the only reading available to us, appears to have more to do with **The Cherry Orchard.** The performance space is arranged with what could be described as a Chekhovian collage comprising billiard table, clock, formal chairs and fragments of family photographs,

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[52] Hunt, A and Reeves, G. **Peter Brook: Directors in Perspective.** C.U.P., 1995. p.234 Production at the Bouffes du Nord, Paris,1981. Dir/des: Peter Brook. Costumes: Chloë Oblensky.
[53]ibid
[54]ibid, p. 236.
[55]Chekhov. **The Three Sisters.** RSC 1988. Dir: John Barton. Goodwin, p. 36

viewed through an etched gauze thickly patterned with leaf prints to suggest wallpaper of (possibly) a nursery.[56] Similarly, the Czech, Vladamir Vsetecka designs an irregular, three-sided 'set' entirely fabricated from torn muslin visibly suspended in a black space.[57] Four L-shaped transparent screens on a steep rake comprise a more substantial, taut gauze structure in Peter Perina's set for that play.[58]

In all these East European productions, as in Hudson's design for **The Cherry Orchard**, gauze is more than a metonymic representation of memory or nostalgia. It is a physical manifestation - a tangible fabric that allows a spectator to witness and experience the filtering of 'reality'. Of recent British productions, Hudson's stylistic approach to the play most resembles Nettie Edwards' - although because the auditoria are so different - hers was at Cheltenham Everyman with its Victorian gilded and cherubed proscenium arch - the overall effect was quite different:

> I prefer to make an abstract statement which suggests and which opens out possibilities. I felt that when I was designing **The Cherry Orchard**. The whole of the first act is taken up with the characters' memory of this cherry orchard. So, not only whose memory do you show, but how much do you show - if anything? Should it remain in the imagination of the audience? What I tried to find was an image that was nothing to do with reality, but when a spectator bled through to that reality in her imagination, she could feel the power and the awe that the place exercised through the characters' emotional memory. It was simply lit gauze.[59]

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[56]ibid p. 218. **The Three Sisters.** V. Kingiseppa nim.Tallinna Riiklik Akadeemiline Draamateater 1974. Dir: A.Shapiro. See Appendix C, p. 201

[57]ibid p. 226. **The Three Sisters**. Krasjské divaldo Pribam,1985. Dir: E. Kaderávek. See Appendix C, p. 202

[58]ibid p. 230 **The Three Sisters**. Studio one-Dalhousie Arts Centre1986. Dir; A. Andrews. (Of the Canadian, Perina) 'his slanted surface and unstable space was characteristic of the works of the more notable stage designers of the1987 PQ. See Appendix C, p. 203

[59]Dir: Martin Houghton. Cheltenham Everyman, 1992. See Appendix A, p. 66

We see gauze serving as an agent or link between past, present and future. The final tableau of the Noble/Hudson production has Firs, the old survivor of the old order, left to die in the house where he has served all his life. The gauze box/coffin is lowered to leave him as a caged relic, shrouded in the mists of the past.

OBJECTS AS IMAGE. FURNITURE AS SET.

Furniture in this production goes beyond the merely practical or purely authentic.[60] Apart from the deliberate exaggeration of the wall of suitcases and the shrouding of the nursery furniture at the opening (the pile is non-realistically large), the furniture on the stage is paired down to what, in a fully naturalistic production, would be considered as *less* than the essential. At the opening of Act Two (stage direction: *Open country*), there is only one centrally placed bench. Like a game of musical chairs the number of people in each successive group always appears larger than the number that can be seated on the bench, hence whoever is not seated is relegated to the position of awkward outsider. At the opening of the act Dunyasha sits between Charlotte and Yasha with Epihodov standing apart, upstage. The positioning of the bench itself and the positioning of the bodies on the bench prohibits any communication between the seated characters,[61] and Epihodov's appalling serenading of Dunyasha from afar prefigures the later grouping with Ranevskaya in high-status position central within the group. The parody is compounded as the proxemics change - the contrived formality of the first group disintegrates as Yasha, cigar still in hand,

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[60] Authentic is clearer than the slippery concept of 'period'. When we describe furniture as 'period' do we mean of the period when the play was written, of the time the play describes/is set, or of the 'period' of that country house's furnishings? (Gaev describes the bookcase as one hundred years old, for example.) I use authentic in the sense that Chekhov set the play contemporaneously (1904) and 'authentic' applies to the furniture that might have been seen at that time in a Russian country house.

[61] See production photograph, Appendix C, p. 204

carelessly throws Dunyasha off the bench onto the ground for a rough kiss then quickly recovers his formal composure when he hears Ranevskaya's party arriving. Ranevskaya then occupies half of the bench and gestures to Gaev to share it with her. Now Lopakhin is excluded. In his ill-fitting clothes and inappropriate hat, he is forced to sit awkwardly on the ground. The final grouping on and around the garden bench is in response to Ranevskaya's sentimental greeting - as much relief at the opportunity to abandon the subject of debt and loans as any expression of true feeling:

> RANEVSKAYA: Come here, children. My darlings. *(Embraces ANYA and VARYA)* If only you knew how much. I loved you both. Come along, sit here by me.[62]

With an arm round each daughter and all of them in white, like a mother swan her gesture is an archetype of maternal protection, but, as in Act One where she sits centre stage on the half covered furniture, the other characters simultaneously flank her.[63]

The positioning of the furniture is as important as the furniture itself. As in Brook's production there is a single piece of furniture for the Act Three ballroom scene, but in Noble's production, rather than the occupation, it is the vacancy of the *méridienne*[64] (like the bench in isolation and centrally placed) which provides the more eloquent statement. Ranevskaya is too agitated to sit down. The estate might have been sold - bourgeois stability is threatened - so too is her sexual attraction. Her argument with Trofimov who has just stated his 'above love' relationship with her daughter, is conducted from either end of the empty 'daybed' - symbol of the leisured class and reminder of Paris. She thumps its arm for emphasis:

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[62] Gill version.p.42

[63]. Appendix C, p. 205

[64] A daybed with either one or two curled-over arm ends of the *directoire* period (i.e., leading up to and immediately following the French Revolution.)

RANEVSKAYA: ... It's all right for you. .... I've lost it . Oh you're so young.... You have no fear of the future because you have no experience of what the future can hold.....This is where my mother and father lived, and my grandfather. I love this house. I can't conceive of my life without the cherry orchard. If they are going to sell it then let them sell me with it...[65]

From Ranevskaya's point of view, the grossness of Lopakhin's triumphalism is accentuated by his lapse of drawing room manners. He violates the furniture. He jumps onto the *méridienne* before collapsing drunkenly across it and crying into the hem of her dress. His final act of desecration is to kick over a small sidetable placed almost off stage left; which until this point has been unlit and unnoticed but now assumes metaphorical significance with Lopakhin's clumsy collision and exit line, "Never mind I can pay for it!"

Hudson's style is diametrically opposed to what Bablet objected to - a cluttered representationalism 'free of synthesis or selection'. Hudson's respect for the given space of the Swan is manifested by a lack of 'décor' and 'period' detail (there is not a samovar or unused object to be seen) resulting in a metonymic sparseness that invites 'the collaboration of the viewer's intelligence and imagination'.

The bookcase is not *practical* in that books are not taken out of it as part of the action, but it is addressed and caressed. Ranevskaya kisses it, Varya, by unlocking it with her key to extract the telegrams from Paris, points up her chaste and dutiful existence in contrast to her mother's loose living. ('If I'd had any money...I'd have gone into a convent.' Act Three) For Gaev the bookcase is revealed to be as powerful an interior symbol of the past as is the exterior cherry orchard. And once again,

[65] Gill version Act 111 p.57

particularly as Gaev has just referred to rooting round 'in the bottom drawer' the individual sexual and emotional is concomitant with the collective and the political:

> GAEV: Yes, it's a good piece of furniture. *(Feeling the bookcase)* My dear and honoured bookcase, I salute your hundred years of devotion to the ideals of virtue and justice. *(Through tears)* For a hundred years your existence has sustained our family from generation to generation. Your silent call has fostered in us a faith in a brighter future, the need to work for the public good and instilled in us a sense of duty to others.[66]

The chapter **Drawers, Chests and Wardrobes** in Bachelard's **The Poetics of Space** is devoted to the sexual associations of furniture:

> Wardrobes with their shelves, desks with their drawers, and chests with their false bottoms are veritable organs of the secret psychological life. Indeed, without these objects ...our intimate life would lack a model of intimacy. They are hybrid objects, subject objects. Like us, through us and for us, they have a quality of intimacy.....Every poet of furniture - even if he be a poet in a garret and therefore has no furniture - knows that the inner space of an old (drawer) is deep. A (drawer's) inner space is also *intimate space*, space that is not open to just anybody.'[67]

Nettie Edwards had placed the bookcase in the same terrain of the imagination as she did the orchard itself. As in Noble's production, there was no physical evidence of the orchard, but Edwards went further in her suggestion of the bookcase via a giant crazy-näive painting on the back flat.[68] And in his 1980 design, Levental

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[66] ibid p.24

[67] Bachelard, Gaston, **The Poetics of Space**. Trans. Maria Jolas. Beacon, 1969, p. 78

[68] See Appendix A, p. 63

omits the bookcase altogether - the ultimate expression of individual, subjective memory.

In the Noble/Hudson production, the bookcase is apparent as a solid, three dimensional object in Acts One and Four but it is not authentic in the sense that, unlike the *méridienne*, it could not have come from out of a country house. Larger-than-life, it makes a similarly hyperbolic statement to the wall of suitcases. Placed slightly off centre upstage, it only announces its presence when it is specifically lit. This occurs during Gaev's address and for the final image at the end of Act One when an enlarged shadow of the bookcase is cast across the nursery floor. In the last act, if the bookcase is there at all, the suitcase barricade obscures it. What had been perceived as solid permanent features, as 'built in', whether objects or people, are now dominated by the temporary and unstable furniture of departure.

HOUSE AS SET

The manner in which the stairs and galleries of the Swan Theatre are incorporated into the space recalls the production of Peter Brook's at the Bouffes du Nord, but the two 'houses' are entirely different.[69] Brook's environment is one of exaggerated decay and the frame is entirely theatrical, for although chopped off and broken down, the boxes and arches remain. There is no reference to the natural world in the manner of the exposed wood of the Swan Theatre. When he recreated the production at the old Majestic Theatre in Brooklyn, New York, later that year, it was in the semi-ruin of the **Mahabharata** shell:

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[69] Also noted by Michael Billington in his review of this production. (**The Guardian**, 6 July, 1997)

> [Plaster and] paint still crumbled from the walls, fragments of friezes were chipped and mottled. Ducts were exposed. Decades of dirt around the proscenium arch was left. Nothing in the restoration was made too nice. It looked like a theatre in decay.[70]

Nothing could be further from the RSC image.

Noble uses the skeleton of the Swan to extend on and off stage vertically. The off stage balcony area is expanded to include the inference of several bedrooms, with the gallery as upstairs landing. The sound of ascent and descent on wooden stairs is amplified and extended - particularly for Firs's final descent to death. The dimensions of 'the house' are actually and by association, expanded. With Ranevskaya's arrival, the servants cart all the luggage 'upstairs' while Varya organises its positioning; then, with the inevitable circularity of domestic routine, they drag it all down at the end of the play. By this time emotions are fragile, galoshes are flying (over 'banisters') and, as every item is packed and stacked, the barrier grows between those travelling, physically as well as temperamentally, in different directions.

UNIFICATION OF CONTEXT AND CONTENT

I have pointed out that the architectural discourse of the Swan Theatre does not distinguish between the aesthetic of the performance space and the spectator area. The reason for this is that with the absence of the barrier of a proscenium arch, physically, the eye is led around in a continuous curve, which is aesthetically

[70] Hunt and Reeves, p. 239

/stylistically unified by one construction material and 'finish'. It is literally the Wooden O. The architects from the R.H.W.L. partnership who designed The Donmar Warehouse speak of 'the softening and welcoming effect of timber', how 'the architecture informs the production by bringing the auditorium into the acting space' and how in their design for the New Manchester Concert Hall the insertion of timber was 'to add to the nobility of the space.'[71] Reardon's construction of the new Swan Theatre in wood (albeit in the shell of a Victorian building) thus has one foot in the school of contemporary theatre architecture and the other in re-creation of Jacobean playhouse. The difference is the status of wood then and now. In the seventeenth century timber, particularly oak, was grown as a crop and it was the commonest construction material:

> Straight oak made posts and beams, thinner branches made rafters and joists, curved boughs made braces, sawn sections made floorboards, inferior stuff when split made laths and wattles, the bark was essential for tanning, the twigs made a merry fire. It is hardly surprising that the sturdy oak remains part of our folklore.[72]

Hardwood now is an expensive commodity - a luxury item in that other available construction materials are far cheaper. What was commonplace to the Jacobeans appears as stylish and expensive to a late twentieth century spectator.

There is a third hinterland suggested by hardwood. It might be perceived as 'heritage architecture' - to make the old accessible by turning it into something clean and polished appropriate for an interior - unlike the oak timbers used for the

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[71] **Make Space!** Theatre Design Conference, 1995. Paper by Julian Middleton

[72] Brumskill, R.W., **Timber Building in Britain.** Gollanz, 1985, p. 55

reconstruction of the (outdoor) Globe, for example. (For this reconstruction hand-lathed Herefordshire green oak that will 'move' and will have an asymmetrical handcrafted finish was chosen.) The Reardon look is entirely appropriate for this production. In fact, the Swan is constructed out of Douglas fir and pine but the uniform stain and polish suggest that it is made of hardwood. To contemporary sensibilities this is an elegant interior, a 'des.res' - open plan with gallery, spacious with minimal furniture (antiques only) and fully exposed hardwood throughout with beautiful finish.

By topological implication and performance indication, the garden/ orchard/wood surrounds the house, so in this production the wooden construction of the Swan Theatre as house has something of the literal inside-out effect articulated more specifically by the1980 Levental design for **The Cherry Orchard.**

Wood as landscape and wood as construction material has a direct association with the part of Russia where the play is set. South of both the tundra and the taiga is a band of mixed deciduous forest:

> Here the firs, pines and larches of the north are interspersed with large stands of (chiefly) birch and oak...with a somewhat better climate and more fertile soils they, unlike the taiga, have been cleared and tilled since the beginnings of Russian history.[73]

Like the Elizabethan/Jacobean builders of timber-framed houses in England and Wales

> every tree they cut down was used for a specific purpose: nothing was wasted...This applies to the *prichelini (*wooden roof tile) and the *okhlyupen.* (Hollowed out logs running along the ridge of the roof.)....

[73] Milner-Gulland, R and Dejevsky, N., **Atlas of Russia and the Soviet Union,** Phaidon,1989

> Every building blends into the surrounding landscape extraordinarily well, becoming an organic extension of nature adapted to human needs....the log structure (*srub*) not only served as the functional, practical foundation for each building; it also contained all the artistic and expressive elements common to these villages.[74]

We see now how the notion of wood, dead or alive, natural or crafted, constitutes a network of connotation which infuses this production with the nostalgic sense of 'coming home'. Unlike Brook's production, the interior-exterior relationship is one of harmony. The spectator is travelling simultaneously on two separate journeys; one literal and one imaginative. The imaginative journey is through the exterior, natural wooded landscape, and the cherry 'garden' around the house to the timbered interior. The actual experience is a combination of English Heritage and the theatrical. S/he has negotiated the external surrounds of Stratford-on-Avon, home of Shakespeare and town of timber framed houses - a literal representation of 16-17th century wooded English landscape - to arrive within a recreation of a Jacobean, timbered theatre as a member of the audience/house.

Brook described the play as 'a poem about life and death and transition and change. Chekhov was writing it when he was dying.'[75] New buildings demand the death of a tree; new régimes require the felling of the old. The play is set in a Russia of elegantly crafted wooden dachas set in cherry gardens which, Come the Revolution, will literally be razed to the earth.

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[74] Opolovnikov. A.V. and Y.A., **The Wooden Architecture of Russia**, Thames and Hudson,1989, p. 32

[75] Hunt and Reeves, p. 234

Chapter 2

INTENTION AND RECEPTION OF THE IMAGE

HERMENEUTICS AND THE INTENTIONAL FALLACY.

TRANSLATION OF EMOTIONAL RESPONSE INTO LANGUAGE.

OPEN OR CLOSED DESIGN.

DESIGNERS ON DESIGNING SHAKESPEARE.

DESIGNERS ON CRITICS' PERCEPTION/RECEPTION

Delicately poised somewhere between intention and interpretation is, if not *the* meaning, *a* meaning of the image. Hermeneutics originally confined its definition to 'the art or science of interpretation, *especially of Scripture*'[1] but the last two centuries have seen a shift in the meaning of the term so that it now embraces text in a more general sense. The hermeneuticist, Gadamer, in his **Truth and Method** (1975) argues that no non-literal text has a finite meaning. It is dependent on the historical and cultural situation of the interpreter. The questions he addresses are entirely relevant to those facing a spectator interpreting theatre design:

> What is the meaning of a [scenographic] text? How relevant to this meaning is the [designer's] intention? Can we hope to understand works that are culturally and historically alien to us? Is 'objective' understanding possible, or is all understanding relative to our own historical situation?[2]

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[1]**The Shorter Oxford Dictionary,** 1978 edition.

[2]I have adapted Terry Eagleton's interpretation (**Literary Theory. An Introduction.** Blackwell, 1983, p.66.) The logocentricity of his approach is highlighted by the statement in the following paragraph: 'Meaning was not objective in the sense that an

Godamer argues that all interpretation of past texts emerges from a dialogue between past and present; but this is not a simple process. The contemporary reader's cultural baggage can, literally, be *impedimenta* to understanding, as can ignorance. A young child is unlikely to appreciate the iconographic significance of a large statue of Lenin dominating the performing area. The dialogue between past and present can merge in a manner that could be considered as either confusing or enriching. For example, when drama students were asked what they thought the numbers stamped on the upper arms of the performers might suggest, one said **Baywatch**[3] and another, Auschwitz. Without being aware of the context, such a bizarre contradiction in interpretation coming from two spectators of comparable age and geo-cultural backgrounds might lead us to the conclusion that any meaning extracted from a theatrical visual image is so unstable as to be meaning-less. But, once we know that (a) this was a devised piece called **Office Jungle** about cruel animal behaviour in bureaucratic organisations and (b) that it was an idea coming from an actor which both the director and the designer liked, so it was adopted and (c) the actor's reasoning behind the idea was that, 'the office workers have had any individuality and sensitivity drained from them and are lost in a hierarchical numbers' game' - then intention within the collaborative structure and diversity of readings 'make sense'.

The 'Intentional Fallacy' is a phrase from an essay by W.K.Wimsatt.[4] In the canon of literary theory he was one of the first to propose that it is not necessarily the author who holds the key to the meaning of the text. The most famous example is of Jane Austen describing her **Mansfield Park** as 'a novel about ordination' - a description most readers are unlikely to recognise. What Wimsatt was arguing for was critical concentration on actual performance: what the text says regardless of the creator's supposed intention. To post-Derridean literary theorists, the concept of there

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armchair is...'To a reader of a scenographic text, there is no 'objective' armchair. Its age, style, texture, state, colour and so on will radiate a myriad of meanings.

[3]Students at the Welsh College of Music and Drama, Feb 1997. This was not a facetious comment. The life-savers in this American television soap-opera have numbers stamped on their arms.

[4]Wimsatt, W.K. and Beardsley, M., **The Verbal Icon**. Lexington A, p. 161, Ky., 1954

being no stable meaning is a given, but Wimsatt had prepared the way. His theory developed into reader-response theory where it is stressed that the reading process is a dialogue between author/text and reader; the dialogue results in the formation of a set of new, possibly different meanings. Because theatre production is collaborative, the process of interpreting theatre is even more layered than that of constructing meaning from a novel. It is no longer an intimate dialogue between text and reader. The 'conversation' is a public debate between at least four elements - the written text, the performance text, the scenography and the spectator. The individual spectator is thus creating a meta-production influenced by what cultural experience or expectation s/he brings to this event.

Within any one audience, these cultural influences are not necessarily disparate and contradictory. As we have gathered from RSC marketing analyses,[5] there is a recognisable profile of the RSC Stratford-upon-Avon audience just as there is a 'target' audience of lesbians and gay men at the Drill Hall Theatre, London. Because the individual spectator is part of a collective - the audience - this view of the process of reader-response comes near to what Stanley Fish describes as 'the interpretative community'.

> Interpretative communities are made up of those who share interpretative strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions. In other words, these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way round.[6]

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[5]E.P. interview with Sian Sterling, marketing officer, RSC. Appendix A, p.161

[6]Fish, Stanley. **Is There a Text in this Class?** Cambridge, Mass. Harvard Univ. Press. 1980, p.171. A reader-response theory also appropriated by Susan Bennett in **Theatre Audiences**. Routledge, 1990, p. 42. It is worth noting Selden's comment; 'by

In a sample of responses to the RSC tour of **Henry VI**[7], via questionnaire and discussion, students on a National Diploma for Performing Arts course, from Hereford, interpreted the scenography within a notably agricultural/rural frame of reference, (to one - 'barn doors' were suggested, another sensed - 'autumn with the brown floor covering it looked like a forest with light seeping through the branches.'[8] [sic] whereas an audience of school children attending the performance in their home town of Belfast, not surprisingly construed meaning through a different set of experiences. ('There was dead fowliage [sic] on the ground which was covered in dirt and rubbish like the war had been going on for years.')[9]

Although I would argue for a rigorous relegation of scenography to a part of the whole kaleidoscopic process of production, this does not imply that we cannot isolate scenography as a study much in the way we may look closely at the written play-text in isolation from what we know to be the *whole* experience of theatre. Ian Mc Neil has emphasised that there are no literary theories that can fully embrace scenography because it is 'a bastard art form'.[10] Certainly scenography is interpretative of a text, whether literary, musical, choreographic or purely performative, but it is no more a *secondary* text than Shakespeare's **Troilus and Cressida** is 'secondary' to either Homer, Ovid, Lydgate, Caxton or Chaucer; nor is **Brecht/Weill's The Threepenny Opera** 'secondary' to Gay's **Beggar's Opera** simply because it is inspired by it or came after it chronologically. As Albery put it, in relation to the

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reducing the whole process of meaning-production to the already existing conventions of the interpretative community, Fish seems to abandon all possiblility of deviant interpretations or resistances to the norms which govern acts of interpretation.' (**Contemporary Literary Theory**. Harvester Wheatsheaf. 1993, p. 60) and Freund 'The appeal to the imperialism of agreement can chill the spines of readers whose experience of the community is less happily benign than Fish assumes.' (**The Return of the Reader: Reader-Response Criticism**. Methuen 1987, p. 87.

[7]Shakespeare. **Henry V1**. RSC tour. Leominster Leisure Centre, Oct. 1994. The Whitla Hall, Belfast, Nov. 1994. Dir: Kate Mitchell, Des: Rae Smith.

[8]See Appendix B, pp.176-177

[9]Study carried out by E.P. with the assistance of Wendy Greenhill (Head of Education, RSC) See Appendix B, p. 175

[10]MacNeil. Theatre Design Conference, The Royal Court, 1996.

source text, design 'tells *a* story but not necessarily *the* story.'[11] Just as a play text exists to be performed, so a set design exists to be performed upon, in and around, but that does not exclude it from separate and serious examination.

The objective here is to examine the way in which scenography communicates meaning. Given that we are not discussing abstract art, we are confining ourselves to a source text and that the scenographic expression of that text is (ideally) a result of dialogue between director and designer, we can justifiably bring in the designers' own intentions. And because the work under discussion is contemporary, we are not having to battle with historical shifts of meaning. As Panofsky states in his **Meaning in the Visual Arts**:

> Where the sphere of practical objects ends, and that of 'art' begins, depends then, on the 'intention' of the creators.[12]

As the audience survey indicates[13], there was a wide variation of response to the 1996 RSC production of **Troilus and Cressida**. (RST. Dir: Ian Judge, Set Des: John Gunter, Costume Des: Deidre Clancy) During the course of the interview Gunter was asked whether it concerned him that 'his' images are not interpreted in the way he intended them to be. It was explained that a questionnaire had been based on the design for this particular production, and one question asked was **'What does the set remind you of or make you think about?'** and that these were some of the answers received:

> (1) Bloody battle scenes; (2) hospital waiting room; (3) ancient city - wartorn; (4) Dali painting; (5) dead trees; (6) depressing and run down (sic); (7) adventure playground; (8) The Troubles in Ireland; (9)

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[11]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 10

[12]Panofsky, E. Penguin Books, 1970. p. 36. He does continue - ..." 'intentions' are, *per se*, incapable of being defined with scientific precision."

[13]See Appendix B, pp. 164-74.

pornography, graffiti; (10) boring and heavy (sic); (11) Polish Gothic Church; (12) Sarejevo; (13) Municipal rubbish dump.

Gunter replied:

It's all of that really. A lot of what I intended is alluded to there. It was certainly meant to be war-torn. It could have been any battle arena from Ancient Greece to Bosnia. The images ranged from shields to tin hats. It was an attempt to suggest what happens after seven years of war.

Is Gunter's answer satisfactory? The list may add up to form a composite, ('It's all of that really') but, to isolate a single response from the context of a list, is it possible to say that the spectator number 7 who created a meta-text of an 'adventure playground' might be 'wrong '- in the sense of seeing something that was not there? ('Is that a large bird? No, I'm wrong, it's an aeroplane.'[14]) But the question of whether a response is 'wrong' in the sense of incorrect is an inappropriate one, for we are dealing neither with scientific data nor tangible realities so when we ask what a spectator 'sees' we are asking what does s/he *understand by* - what does s/he *see into.* After all, it is conceivable that s/he may have been influenced by the Jane Howells' production of the Henry VI plays, for example, which were set in just such an arena - Bayldon's adventure playground exploited the visual pun of the 'theatre' as arena or

[14]Reminiscent of, but opposed to the Hamlet /Polonius exchange where the similies attached to the cloud are open to interpretation - i.e the issue is not whether either of the characters is being *factually* correct.
Hamlet: Do you see yonder cloud that's almost in shape of a camel?
Polonius: By th' mass and tis like a camel indeed.
Hamlet: Methinks it is like a weasel.
Polonius: It is backed like a weasel.
Hamlet: Or like a whale ?
Polonius: Very like a whale. (III. iii 366)

playground of war where the 'play' is 'played',[15] Or, when we note that the following question, **Did you like it/think it worked?** elicited the reply 'Yes, because they behaved like spoilt children', we appreciate the symbiosis of the production elements and how, within an interpretation of the performance text, the rendition of the actors colours the scenographic reading. If the performers act as rampaging children, the spectator will 'see' playground.

The response of number nine - 'pornography, graffiti' - is interesting because it implies a side-stepping from a reading specifically of the set, towards a reading of the costumes - in particular the first entrance of the suggestively leather-clad Trojans who then strip off. This spectator has made an imaginative leap from the depiction of war-damaged walls to 'graffiti' with the implication that the graffiti is pornographic. There is, *in fact*, no actual graffiti on the walls. In a sense, number nine's 'graffiti' was 'more imagined' than number seven's 'adventure playground'. Number seven has extended what was actually in front of him - a reification of the playground of war - presumably to accommodate imagined slides, tunnels and ropes, whereas 'graffiti' was entirely fabricated. We are thus embracing the two meanings of both 'imagine and 'fabricate'. which are either to invent or to falsify.

The description, 'boring and heavy', might be interpreted as an unsophisticated, anti-intellectual, teenage vernacular response to the production as a whole - on the other hand, as an appreciation of what the set was trying to reflect, as Gunter points out, 'That after seven years' siege yet Troy walls stand.' (1,iii,12) it is entirely apposite. Both sides of the conflict were heartily bored by this stage, but the stout city walls still stood.

'The Troubles in Ireland', 'Bloody battle scenes', 'Sarejevo' and 'war torn' are clear examples of interpretation meeting intended meaning - to express the effects of long-lasting and irresolvable conflict.

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[15]The BBC **Henry V1, parts 1, 2 and 3. 1981/2**. Dir: Jane Howells, Des: Oliver Bayldon.

'Polish Gothic church' suggests an example of the RSC 'returner', and presents the possibility of vicarious rather than empirical cultural influences. In 1995, the Other Place was transformed into the interior of a crumbling, ancient Eastern European Church that became a war refugees' sanctuary in David Edgar's **Pentecost**.[16] The dominant image of this production was the 'war torn' back wall.

'Dead trees' poses further problems. There are no dead trees visible - although the change of scene to the orchard is indicated by the flying in of what could be construed as a thorn bush[17] But the 'dead trees' image can be justified as a *metaphorical* response. The wording of the question was, after all, **'What does the set remind you of/make you think about?'** The response is an indicator of one of the main purposes of design - to set off a chain of associations in the imagination of the beholder, comparable, although not necessarily similar (the difference between metaphor and simile) to such a chain set off by its creator. Gunter illustrates the progression in the following extract. He was asked about the significance of the flown-in thorn bush - whether its function was purely practical. Perhaps the director had decided that what was needed at this point was an indicator to suggest the change of location to domestic/private *exterior* (in the text it's an orchard), or was there a meaning resonating beyond that?

> I was influenced by the documentation of the First World War. There are no trees left alive. They are dead. The link is very strong between sex and death. The sexual behaviour of people in war is very different from that of peacetime. It's a fear of that link that has fuelled the controversy about the film "**Crash**".[18]

We have moved a long way from the Trojan War, but the links in the association chain are clear. The terms we might usefully adopt here are Derridean -

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[16]Edgar, D. **Pentecost**. RSC Other Place. Dir: Michael Attenborough, Des: Robert Jones.
[17]Act 3, ii,15. *Pandarus:* Walk here i' the orchard, I'll bring her straight.
[18]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 96

particularly the notion of 'différance', (in the deferred meaning sense) 'slippage' and 'trace.' Derrida, in his challenge of the stability of the Saussurean sign (or, for the purpose of scenography, image) argues that signs differ not only from each other, but also from themselves in that their constitutive nature is one of constant displacement or *trace* - the trace left by an infinite chain of unstable re-signification within a boundless context of intertextuality.[19]

TRANSLATION OF EMOTIONAL RESPONSE INTO LANGUAGE

Apart from making a case for the separate study of image within a production, which I will develop in chapter four, we have to acknowledge that despite audience research and informed guesses, it is difficult, verbally, to pin down the reading of image. The questionnaires were littered with crossings-out and indications of hesitancy, indecision and occasionally, debate. ('I felt that it showed....but my partner saw it as...),[20] In published work, however, there has developed a certain glibness of description which passes as scenographic analysis and ignores any sense of *trace*. For example, this account of Hurry's set for the 1960 production of **Troilus and Cressida**:

> The set simply but shrewdly underscored the play's concerns with the shiftingness of human values and human relationships, the spiritual wasteland that made possible the physical wasteland of the final battle scenes.[21]

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[19]Derrida, Jaques. **Positions**. University of Chicago Press. 1981. p. 81
[20]See Appendix B, pp. 164-174
[21]Leiter, Samuel, ed. **Shakespeare Around the Globe**: *A Guide to Notable Postwar Revivals*. Greenwood Press. New York/London,1986, p. 754

Ignoring the 'simply but... (effectively)' cliché still beloved by regional newspaper reviewers, it would be helpful to know *how* the 'physical wasteland' was 'made possible.' What is meant by 'wasteland' in this context? Are we in T.S. Eliot territory? It is the superficial slickness of the language here, rather than the struggling uncertainties revealed by the questionnaire, that indicate the limitations and problems of a linguistic response.

John Berger introduces his book with a powerful and lyrical case for the supremacy of the image:

> When in love, the sight of the beloved has a completeness which no words and no embrace can match: a completeness which only the act of making love can temporarily accommodate. This seeing which comes before words can never be quite covered by them.[22]

The implication is that the language of images, including scenographic vocabulary, is untranslatable into prose; that scenography has its own alternative language which, by definition, transmits in a different way, in a medium separate to the logocentric text. To an extent this has to be the case, but on the other hand, the images under discussion are selected and man-made - a result of intellect and human creativity rather than accident, which surely gives us some right to unpack them.

Choreography presents a similar problem of translation as Jenny Gilbert illustrates in her review of a Siobhan Davies dance piece:

> ...Like any language, (her work) has a recognisable vocabulary, phrases and grammar. Unlike any language I know, it is not designed to say anything directly at all...The dance spoke that was enough.[23]

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[22]Berger, John.**Ways of Seeing**. BBC and Penguin Books, 1972, p. 8
[23]**Independent On Sunday**. 25 May, 1997

Are we now anchored in the postmodern position then, that as long as *something* is communicated visually to a spectator, however difficult that is to define and whatever it is, that is 'enough'? Or is this a result of what Baugh describes as 'dangerous individualism' - when the scenographer has felt the need to go out on a limb, to redefine himself as either a fine artist or performance artist so that his contribution is so personal and is so highlighted that it separates itself out from the other production components, proclaiming its meaning to only a tiny minority?[24] If this occurs, might any meaningful dialogue be confined to only the cognoscenti composed of other theatre designers? Gilbert's review continues by suggesting just this élitism:

> .... at a performance of Davies' latest piece, *Bank* (Bank of England? Bank of Violets? Banked fury?) I came under the distinct impression that the fine dancers of the Siobhan Davies Company were communing with no one but themselves.

Contemporary designers and directors generally strike a balance between (a) being concerned about clear communication of their (joint) understanding of the written text and (b) adopting a post modern position - i.e. renunciating any hierarchical positioning of the creator(s) so as to allow each individual spectator (within the collective of an audience) to claim ownership of meaning.

Tim Albery 's viewpoint embraces some of the questions of response encountered with the **Troilus and Cressida** questionnaire:

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[24]Christopher Baugh. Theatre Design Conference. RNT 23 May 1997. Keynote speaker. See also Albery's 'definition of good design' E.P. interview. Appendix A, p. 8. 'It's totally itself but it couldn't exist other than in this production. In other words, whatever its historical antecedence or aesthetic debt, which inevitably it has, that debt doesn't parade itself.'

> If you are not trying too hard to engage the audience on an intellectual, conceptual level - the 'I see, they're telling us it's all like a concentration camp' school - and if you are trying to deal on a level of ambiguity, then you're offering up ideas which resonate rather than provide specific answers. So in that way the question of 'getting it' doesn't arise. I have found that the less academic the audience, the closer the response is to the visceral, non-intellectual one I had myself.[25]

On the other hand, Dudley is worried enough by the problem of audience interpretation to go as far as to alter his work as a reaction to a misunderstanding of his intention:

> It staggers me sometimes, the assumptions people make. I did a production of **Heartbreak House** with Trevor Nunn a couple of years ago which had a backcloth representing the South Downs, overlooking the Channel - and the number of people who asked me why I had put the play under water was astounding. I could **not** see how they saw that, but enough people read it in that way to worry Trevor (Nunn), so at the end of the preview week I repainted it.[26]

This says as much about the hierarchical authority of the director as it does about the continuous call for unambiguous representationalism from the majority of the audience in conventional theatre contexts.

Iona McLeish is another designer concerned about 'misunderstanding', although she is careful to point out that it is not her sole responsibility if a spectator is confused:

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[25]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 10
[26]E.P. interview. Appendix A, p. 53

It's not just **my** work though, is it? Once the whole thing is in front of you, the design is only one aspect. I have, for example, had a lot of criticism for my last piece, **The Women of Troy** at the National (1995). People didn't seem to understand it. *Most of the feed-back you tend to get is from theatre people as I suppose they're more likely to understand what you're on about.* Sometimes it's a bit upsetting to realise that some people just aren't getting the point of what they are looking at. I did have a comment from someone about a show I did called **From the Mississippi Delta** which was something like 'what a shame that they could only afford corrugated iron.'[27]

McLeish has also raised the question of a theatre-literate clique which Deirdre Clancy, (costume designer for **Troilus and Cressida**) amplifies when she opines that the audience generally 'don't pick up the details' of subtle characterisation communicated, for example, via the cut and fit of a costume.'[28]

It irritates me sometimes but the approval we all need has to come from one's peers. If it gets through to an audience, that's a bonus, but I think, generally speaking, an audience wants and expects display more than the postmodernist school of directors - and designers - realise. People ring up the RSC to ask if the production is going to be 'traditional' or in bin liners and string vests. And then they don't come if they hear the latter. They don't want to be challenged or threatened. People should tell directors this. Of course they don't.

[27]E.P. Interview. Appendix A, p. 136
[28]E.P. Interview. Appendix A, p. 37

Clancy is of course putting forward a conservative, pessimistic and generalised argument, but the issue of language and communication is contained in her point of view. But we might feel, like Edwards, that the designer should constantly be breaking new communication barriers and accustoming the spectator to challenge so that we are disappointed and 'concerned if, when a member of an audience sees something s/he wasn't expecting, s/he feels threatened.[29]

McDonald has a more pragmatic explanation of why the visual constituent of so few productions is exciting and intellectually challenging .The play-safe crowd-pleasing director and/or designer is more likely to stay in work. He feels that certain directors and designers 'haven't got as far in Britain as their talent suggests they should' because:

> ...their productions don't make an audience feel comfortable. (The audience) worries that they aren't 'getting' it, that it's too clever for them, whereas there are some designers constantly in work at the moment because they make their audiences feel good. (Directors and designers) aren't challenging them.[30]

But he too returns to the difficult question of communicating meaning. ('You don't want to be totally obscure. As in any art form, it's hard to get the balance right.') If the images are worryingly incomprehensible to the majority of the audience and if the language of theatre design is communicable only to other designers, then this one aspect of production is a closed shop.

Is this unsatisfactory state of audience non-comprehension and subsequent sense of threat, entirely the fault of the designer? What it might suggest is that the general public needs to be better visually educated generally and specifically in the

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[29]E. P. Interview, Appendix A, p. 65
[30] E.P. Interview, Appendix A, p. 125

language of scenography. As I will develop, very few theatre critics are visually literate and, particularly compared to other aspects of production, apart from the practical handbook, there is very little published on the subject of scenography in Britain. Even performers are generally ignorant about the function and meaning of design to the point of seeing the work of a designer as an obstacle or impediment rather than as a parallel or complimentary expression of their performance.[31] Might it be possible to extend to scenography what John Berger achieved for the understanding of image in his **Ways of Seeing**?[32] Perhaps Svoboda's writing should be better translated, fully illustrated and placed on more theatre reading lists.

OPEN OR CLOSED DESIGN.

To what extent does a spectator require clarity in their reading of scenography? And does a demand for clarity deny rich ambiguity? A study of practitioners concerned about how their ideas are communicating visually reveals that they do not necessarily insist on a specifically defined or confined mono-reading. They tend to celebrate scenography as an open narrative, and consider that multivalence and variation of response is an enhancement adding value to the original

[31]A view put forward by Ralph Koltai in his keynote speech, Theatre Design Conference. RNT. May, 1997.
[32]Berger, John. **Ways of Seeing.** BBC and Penguin Books, 1972

intention. Pountney feels that the joint responsibility of director and designer is to 'open doors'.

> A completely sealed narrative is limiting. It closes doors because it limits the audience's perception to viewing only that particular event instead of allowing the story to open out in such a way that it relates to other worlds. Music has an abstract quality that makes this possible, and so does design. The skill, for me, is to hold those two things - the narrative and the expressive - in balance. Once you are too prescriptive about how something should be interpreted by an audience you may as well be delivering a lecture. I do think some German directors are guilty of this rigidity in that they are trying to ram home some specific message too hard and so run the risk of over-defining.[33]

Gunter makes a similar point in discussion about the problem of the 'closed' metaphor of the unit or single set. He cites as an example of 'good design' the 1996 Almeida production - Albee's **Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf:**

> It's set in a bear pit - which is just what's needed psychologically. Because it's a very small theatre it 's a very confrontational experience for the audience. That, for me, was a perfect example of director-designer collaboration.[34]

Gunter feels that although a designer is often searching for the 'perfect metaphor' such as the Brecht /Neher boxing ring, 'all-embracing metaphors can be dangerous. They can be dead ends in that they can't develop in the way that a text develops.' He agreed that designs for two previous productions of **Troilus and Cressida,** the 1960 Hall/Hurry sand pit and the 1985 Davies/Koltai desecrated country house were open-ended and 'non-realistic enough to avoid being limiting.'

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[33]E.P. Interview, Appendix A, p. 150
[34]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 91

> The art is trying to get that balance between suggesting and dictating. Often it's the 'brilliant' designs that do this least successfully. The shows that I have been involved with that make the best theatre - those that have been fully integrated in terms of performance, direction and design - are not those that I felt have had the 'best' designs. By 'best' I mean the most technically brilliant or flashiest such as **Guys and Dolls.** I've just done **Skylight**[35] and what was so pleasurable about that was not that the end-product was spectacular - it wasn't - the design was functional - but that the visual contribution was right for the piece. And it was so well worked by Michael Gambon.[36]

What we have returned to is the relegation of design to a part of the whole in that it can be judged only in a dynamic context, not for example, as the plywood model might be by the external examiner of the theatre design course. Instead of asking the clichéd and imprecise question 'Does it work?' we should be asking, 'How well do the director/actors work *it*?'

As Albery points out:

> Theatre design can't stand on its own. That's why I find exhibitions of model boxes so tedious. A model box on its own is sterile. It's dead. It has no meaning or life until something is happening within it.[37]

David Fielding's experiences form a narrative of disillusionment and weariness that has pushed him towards becoming a director/designer (leaving the 'pure' designer behind with a changed name - Paul Bond.) The problems with **Simon Boccanegra** are worth quoting fully because they highlight the difficulty of communicating visual ideas not only to the spectator but also, in 'Bond's' case, to the director:

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[35]by David Hare. Dir: Richard Eyre. RNT 1995, Broadway 1996, Vaudeville Theatre, West End 1997

[36]E.P. interview, p. 92

[37]E.P. interview, p. 9

D.F. If I design something to suggest one thing and an audience sees it as something else, is this a problem? I think the answer has to be no. Take painting as a parallel - there is no way that I will see, looking at a Howard Hodgkin, what he was seeing when he painted it.[38]

E.P. Yes, but stage design isn't abstract painting and although I know Hodgkin gives his work detailed titles, surely design is linked to the whole performance text. It may not be the same narrative, but surely it is connected to it....

D.F. Let's look at choice of colour. Do you remember **Simon Boccanegra**?[39] It was a white tilted floor, half a circle surrounded by a half circular wall. The floor was white and the walls and ceiling were bright red. Why red? It was meant to be located in the twelfth century in the port of Genoa. With that brief, what images are evoked? What can the emotional response be? My intention was for the red to conjure up an imperial quality and the former glories of Rome. Why, one might argue, wasn't it purple? And did any one in the audience realise what the red was meant to signify? Did they all think it was the inside of a giant post-box? I've no idea.

E.P. Do you ever ask?

D.F. No. And no one ever seems to ask me.[40]

Beneath Fielding's petulant tone, the point he raises here – but fails to develop - is at the root of the intention argument. We expect an artist to be able to

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[38]E.P. interview, p.90
[39]Verdi. Dir: David Alden. ENO 1987. Des: Paul Bond, aka David Fielding
[40]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 81

justify his decisions, but what if he is, in a sense, holding the code? Is it not both patronizing and perverse to deliberately lock up meaning in such a way that only the creator can have any idea why it was red rather than purple?

There is the counter-argument that a spectator's first reaction will always be an emotional rather than an intellectual response and it is only with post-production analysis that the *feelings* becomes translated into concepts.From Daldry and MacNeil we find a militant anti-intellectual stance. ~~Daldry is convinced that~~

E.P. Are you concerned about how an audience interprets the design of a show?

I.M. No. It should be an emotional experience and if you start intellectualizing about it, you fail.

S.D. You have your gut reaction, then you test it intellectually. Otherwise it's sterile.

E.P. So you expect a spectator simply to say, 'It made me sad/surprised' rather than 'having the house on stilts heightened its vulnerability and significantly distorted the perspective...' - or whatever?

S.D. You're falling into the trap of confusing post-production analysis with the actual experience of watching the play. And the process of **making** the play is different again.

E.P. But you'd surely admit that in the process of putting a show together you're trying to communicate certain ideas - or feelings, if you like - however child-like. You've said that you are going on a particular

journey, so what if that audience isn't going on the same journey as you? What if those ideas aren't coming across to an audience at all or that they are, but in a completely distorted form?

S.D. So what. As individuals, they all bring a separate set of experiences to their understanding of the piece, so you can't legislate about their reaction. That's not to say that I'm not interested in people's views. Some people have an amazing take on what they've seen.

I.M. I've got three essays by American academics in my drawer on **An Inspector Calls**, which I haven't read. I'm interested that I'm no longer interested, because when I was at university, I would have been writing stuff like that.[41]

The designer who explains his mission and points a middle way most clearly is McDonald:

> In the end I think the only person one can ever do it for is one self. .... You would hope that there are people out there who 'get' everything, but in the end you can only do what you believe is right for the piece at that time.[42]

As readers, should we not celebrate the myriad of meanings that radiate so unpredictably from a scenographic text-in-performance rather than pursue the frustrating attempt to pin down response into one, or at most two, neatly folded and trimmed concepts? What Eagleton applies to deconstruction theory - its ability 'to see

[41]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 111
[42]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 125

...reality less as oppressively determinate than as yet more shimmering webs of undecidability stretching to the horizon'[43] is surely pertinent to scenography.

DESIGNERS ON DESIGNING SHAKESPEARE

In the study referred to earlier (Appendix B) it became apparent that the scenographic reading of Shakespeare's **Troilus and Cressida** was unaffected by the weight of academic and cultural status, but what of designers? Are they conscious of any particular constraints or controls built into designing for Shakespeare's plays? Cairns:

> Shakespeare frightens me a bit, bores me a bit, but I think, as a designer, you should be given a free hand. You have so much choice. With so much in the text you can take any line you want.' I think Shakespeare allows for an emotional response.[44]

This attitude of Cairns is similar to Edwards',

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[43]Eagleton, T. **Literary Theory.** Oxford. Blackwells, 1983, p. 146
[44]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 29

> I go about designing a Shakespeare play just like any other. [The language] is so rich and so strong that it can take any number of interpretations. It has to be my personal, emotional response - which is not the way all directors want to work.[45]

There are designers such as Ormerod who find the richness of verbal imagery a deterrent to attempt any visual competition. Donnellen and Ormerod argue that designing for Shakespeare is a process of elimination. It may be influenced by some knowledge of the original staging of Shakespeare's plays - i.e. the fact that the plays were performed with very little scenery - but the imperative is to create a contemporary aesthetic rather than adhere to any requirement for historical accuracy:

> It's a cliché to say that Shakespeare paints his own scenes and that he doesn't require scenery, but it is true that the word does it in most of the plays that we deal with. Nothing more is needed really than the actor and, say something to sit on - not even that sometimes. So you start off with an advantage that you don't really need anything. The essence of theatre is paring down to the essentials of what you actually need.... The visual side springs out of those essentials.[46]

Timothy O'Brien explored this process of stripping away in his 1968 design for **Troilus and Cressida** which had 'nearly nude warriors on a bare stage,'[47] with a set consisting 'solely of portable pieces, such as military standards and an occasional couch. The action, therefore, took place against a black background that enhanced the sense of bleakness in the play.'[48] In an interview with Kennedy in 1989, O'Brien used

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[45]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 66
[46]Delgado and Heritage (eds). **In Contact With The Gods?** *Directors Talk Theatre.* Manchester U.P. 1996. p. 86.
[47]RSC at RST. 1968. Dir: John Barton. Quoted by Kennedy, p. 240.
[48]Leiter, Samuel (ed.) **Shakespeare Around the Globe**: *a Guide to Notable Postwar Revivals.* Greenwood Press. New york and London. 1986, p. 55

the term 'ritual nakedness' to describe his work at the RSC during this period which referred as much to his sets as to the costumes - or lack of them.

> The challenge for designers of Shakespeare production is to find an unfussy means of unlocking the text - of finding the right metaphor that is pliable enough to embrace more than a single idea and will speak to an audience of today.[49]

Fielding feels that there is too much Shakespeare performed too often. He is not intimidated by the poetry because

> I find the complexity a benefit. Juxtaposition is stimulating. I enjoy putting contemporary design in Victorian theatres for example - so to make Shakespeare's text accessible I like the idea of modernising it; I don't mean the over-specific and probably banal sort of 'let's set it in an Oxford College' idea, but it is possible to find a way which both acknowledges its time and speaks to ours. It's a question of finding the right metaphor.[50]

McDonald feels 'we should be braver':

> I've always envied the Germans their Ring Cycle, because I feel that they can say something about the state of their nation through each new production, and then I think "Well, we have Shakespeare." ...These are the plays that can tell us about what we feel about our times now.[51]

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[49]ibid. p. 55
[50]E.P.interview, Appendix A, p. 82
[51]E.P.interview, Appendix A, p. 130

Undoubtedly some Shakespeare texts are capable of yielding up more specifically political readings than others. **Troilus and Cressida,** as Ralph Berry points out,[52] is a play with an interesting trajectory of directorial interpretations; from the Romantic/ heroic 1948 and 1954 Stratford productions,[53] to productions which reflect a blatantly anti-war political orientation. These extend from the time of the Vietnam war to present day.

McLeish refers to the 'freedom' of foreign cultures when she speaks of 'preferring to work the other way round':

> Rather than design a Shakespeare, which has got such a weight of precedent behind it, I feel freer to explore the design possibilities of work of 'the greats' in other languages. It doesn't matter if it's Sophocles or Ibsen. As long as it's a good, vibrant translation....[54]

Both McLeish and McDonald have made reference to a troubling fact - that some of the most interesting and challenging designs for productions over the last seventy years or so of Shakespeare have not been in England. More to the point - they have not been in the English language. One of the explanations for this is that just as the Berliner Ensemble stranglehold on Brecht productions eventually fossilised and institutionalised what Brecht had always intended to be a developing and organic process, so the 'consumerisation'[55] of the Shakespeare product, the relentless RSC sausage machine, tends to deaden any root and branch radicalism of interpretation. The mission of the RSC is to safeguard a standard of excellence in the speaking of the iambic pentameter according to the teaching of Cicely Berry. Bill Alexander's note to

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[52]Berry, R. **On Directing Shakespeare: Interviews With Contemporary Directors.** MacMillan, London. 1989. p.124-126

[53]1948. Dir: Antony; Quayle, 1954, Dir: Glen Byam Shaw

[54]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 139

[55]Baugh's phrase. Theatre Design Conference, RNT 1997

actors after a rehearsal of **Richard III** is typical of the logocentrism of the organisation:

> The verse...is seventy-five per cent of what this company is about. It is our instrument and our challenge. It would be easy if we were Russians and could have the verse roughly translated and then dazzle with images. We've got to dazzle with Shakespeare's language.[56]

As I pointed out in chapter one, the design ideas based on a study of an Elizaveta Fen translation of **The Cherry Orchard** will differ from those responding to a Trevor Griffiths translation or an English language 'treatment' set in South Africa.[57] Surprisingly, in an otherwise so detailed account of twentieth century Shakespeare scenography, Kennedy barely touches on the cross-cultural issue - the evident visual liberation provided by an up-dated translation of Shakespeare into a foreign tongue. He refers (briefly) to the visual conservatism of the British and their crippling, reverential attitude to 'our greatest poet'. He writes only of the flowering of new European theatres in the 1960s which created a

> visual renaissance that was unprecedented and that has not been matched in the Anglo-American tradition - at least partly because European directors and designers felt little of the responsibility to Shakespeare's text that has, naturally enough, restrained most productions in English in the century.[58]

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[56]Antony Sher. **Year of The King**. Methuen London Ltd. 1985, p. 203
[57]Birmingham Rep. 1997. Dir: Janet Suzman

[58]Kennedy, p. 188

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response. The effect of such a practice is to enshrine certain specific values and qualities of a play above all others.[60]

Designers are united in their despair about what they see as a general visual illiteracy of theatre critics. Dudley tells of the critic's response to his design for **Schweyk in the Second World War**:[61]

> I took as a period reference the wonderful cartoons by Sir David Lowe who was the Evening Standard cartoonist throughout the war. Although they were photographically accurate... they almost unanimously described them as Grosz' cartoons - it was just a lazy association game. If it's Brecht, then it must be Grosz. You can't write a letter to correct them because then you'd be accused of being pretentious and obscure, so they never learn.... Along with most theatre designers, I feel that stage design deserves an appraisal more akin to film criticism. Perhaps we should invite a whole different set of critics to see, and I mean really look at, our shows. Too often (critics) just get things wrong.[62]

Dudley is concerned with their misunderstanding of the finished product, of 'getting things wrong' factually as is Björnson. She feels that 'they're better than they were. At least you don't get the "simple but effective" anymore.' But:

> ...generally speaking, they don't know their painters, their architects or their costume periods. Some of them are visually illiterate. I don't think critics have caught up with the fact that designers have raised their

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[60]McGrath, John. **A Good Night Out**: *Behind the Clichés of Contemporary Theatre.* Methuen.1981, p. 3
[61]Brecht. RNT. 1982. Dir: Richard Eyre
[62]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 54

profile - their contribution is finally being recognised by the public as well as by people in the business.[63]

Cairns is of the opinion that 'their visual education and awareness isn't on a par with their knowledge of music or literature.'

> Designers are often providing something fairly sophisticated - they have developed their craft over the years - whereas, generally speaking, opera critics are knowledgeable about music and drama critics concentrate on the verbal text and the performances. This isn't a problem except that they pronounce with the same authority about design and they simply haven't come on the journey with you.[64]

MacNeil and Daldry's concern is that critics 'try to separate out the experience' of written and visual text 'without having earned that authority'.

> They pontificate about the relationship of text to design.... They don't know about any of the thinking that has gone into creating this performance. They are only concerned with the result. [65]

Santini, who has moved between the rôles of theatre designer and art director for Merchant Ivory films, develops the theme of how narrow critics are in their terms of reference. He feels that critics do not understand the 'healthy cross-fertilisation that we are getting in contemporary culture'.

> How many theatre critics are watching pop video promos or even going to opera? They ought to be. Most of the audience are way ahead of the critics. The recent "exhibition" of Tilda Swinton asleep in a glass

[63]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 21
[64]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 29
[65]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 112

case showed that. People who actually saw it found it fascinating, but you still got from some 'art' critics, "Is this Art?" Does the category matter? It may be performance art or live sculpture - as long as its stimulating, does it matter?[66]

McLeish allows critics the 'luxury' of being able, like the rest of the audience, to tune into any one level of the production (i.e. the literary/verbal) 'because a production is made up of so many (levels).' But, as with the reviewer of **Women of Troy**, who 'wrote at length about the Greek amphitheatre':

> You can't help feeling that critics occasionally miss the point. Why over-emphasise the classicism of the piece when it seems very obvious to me that we had deliberately approached it from a contemporary political standpoint... I suppose you hope that critics have some understanding of what the design is trying to do.[67]

Edwards goes as far as blaming critics for 'holding back the development of theatre.'

> They persist in regarding theatre primarily as literature. Secondly, an art exhibition can have a half page spread where the theatre review - even if it's the National - will have half a column. And if you're in the regions, you have even less cover of course. It says a lot about the status of the work.

The conventional positioning of artist versus critic is an old war still being waged:

> No one asks an artist to produce work. Critics provide a valuable function at least as a sieve, at best as an interpreter, even, at worst, as a destroyer....Best it seems, for any artist to put up and shut up. Indeed, this has become so accepted that any artist who publicly articulates the

[66]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 164
[67]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 136

mildest disagreement with the status quo is considered insecure or a whinger.[68]

Bragg then makes a case for reversing 'the repression of what could be a natural debate. We block the opportunity for intelligent intercourse'. He presumably is referring to our debate - that between intention and interpretation.

Why do we expect the opinion of a theatre reviewer to be any more valid than that of any other spectator? Perhaps we do not. He (and invariably it is 'he') simply is in a position of power by virtue of guaranteed publication. Is it because he is paid, has seen more plays than the majority of the audience, or because he can write quickly? Or is it simply a marketing requirement - i.e. tickets will be sold on the basis of good or bad 'notices?' As Billington admits - 'What gives one the right to criticise? The short answer is: absolutely nothing.'

Albery echoes this opinion:

> Critics over-rationalise. They have to, to get something down that makes sense! But I would suggest that going to the theatre or opera virtually every night of the week makes it hard to respond in an uncluttered, open fashion. There certainly isn't much evidence to suggest that critics are very knowledgeable about fine art - otherwise why would some of them have been so outraged by Antony (McDonald's) **Pelléas and Mélisande**?[69] You might hope that they would have seen it as part of an aesthetic continuum, but they clearly don't. Instead there is the usual tedious insistence about what the last version that they saw was like.[70]

In contrast to Billington's (arguably false) modesty, Kenneth Tynan made higher claims for his rôle:

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[68]Melvyn Bragg, **The Times**. 9 June, 1997
[69]Debussy. Opera North. Dir: Richard Jones, Des: Antony McDonald 1995
[70]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 11

> At any level, criticism must be *accurate reportage* of what has taken place outside you; at the highest level it is also accurate reportage of what has taken place within you.[71]

Tynan seems to be claiming a simultaneous objective factual precision and a subjective emotional response - wanting to describe his cake and taste it at the same time. As designers have repeatedly pointed out, the 'judgement' of scenography by most theatre critics does not match their level of understanding of other production components - the direction, the written and the performance text.

Paul Ricoeur the Reader Theorist, ('the text is open to whoever knows how to read, and whose potential reader is everyone'),[72] argues that a critic, because *he* is 'tied to a certain culture and consequently, he isn't this absolute, disinterested subject, a sort of non-involved ego' has no qualification to 'judge'. In an interview he was asked to 'talk about the formulation of the triple function of the critic; to clarify, to explain and to judge'. Ricoeur replied:

> Phenomenology of the critic is based upon the dialectic between prejudice and prejudgement.... I believe that phenomenology only concerns, it seems to me, the first two, to clarify and to explain, because to *clarify* a work.... is to understand the internal structure of it, to see how the different codes, the different subjacent structures, hold the message of the work: then to *explain* is to put it in connection with its author, its public, its world ...which begins with discourse. I have an impression that *judging*...would be passing judgement of what Kant has called the judgement of personal taste.[73]

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[71]Tynan. K. **Tynan Right and Left**. Foreword. Addison-Wesley Longman Ltd. London, 1967

[72]**Phenomenology and Theory of Literature: An Interview with Paul Ricouer** *Modern Language Notes,* 96:5 (December 1981), pp. 1084-90

[73]ibid

The intention of a comedian is to make people laugh and the success of this objective is immediately measurable. A competent director will test out ideas in a constant dialogue with actors. Apart from the limited oral response such as the post-production comment, or unless they provide their own commentary (as in the Society of British Theatre Designer publications), the only access designers have to any reception of their finished work, the only formal feedback, is via the 'judging' of the theatre critic – if he refers to it at all.

Chapter 3

RECEPTION OF THE IMAGE (2)

A study based on published critical response to scenography.

A RESPONSE TO **TROILUS AND CRESSIDA**
(RSC at the RST, 1996. Dir:Ian Judge, Set:John Gunter, Costume:Deirdre Clancy)

CRITIQUE OF A CRITIC.
(Michael Billington's theatre reviews for **The Guardian** 1972- 1991)

> Theatre design can't stand on its own. ... You shouldn't elevate theatre design above its function as part of the whole. (Albery)[1]

> Often a bad design is absolutely appropriate for a bad show. When do you get a great production and a terrible design? Or a great design and a terrible production? A good show is a seamless combination of design, direction, performance and text. (Daldry)[2]

Against the frame of the designer's intention developed in the previous chapter, while acknowledging the symbiosis of design and direction articulated by Albery and Daldry, I propose to illustrate how histories and contemporary cultural attitudes, as well as other components of a production, influence a theatre critic's perception of the scenography of this particular production of **Troilus and Cressida.**

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[1]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p.10
[2]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p.122
This is not a uniquely contemporary appreciation of the integrated role of set design. The 'stylised realism' of the Reinhardt/Stern **A Midsummer Night's Dream** (1905, Berlin) was rapturously received. 'This was a revelation! Never had such unity between actor and stage decoration been seen. Never before and in a manner so justified, had one seen the stage setting become an actor of such importance in the play. A new impeteus had been given and a new and intense life henceforth entered the modern theatre.' (Fuerst and Hume, **Twentieth Century Stage Decoration**. Originally published by Alfred.A Knopf Ltd.,1929; republished by Dover Publications,1967, p.16)

The analysis of the audience survey in the previous chapter acknowledges the hesitancy and uncertainty in commenting on the visual input.[3] My objective now is to assess the scenographic perception based on a study of all the available twenty-five press reviews of this production,[4] followed by an interrogation of the impact of scenography on the theatre critic, Michael Billington.

Such a mapping out of discursive formulation (the headline/content tension) finds us conforming to Foucault's theories; in particular how institutions wield power through discourse.[5] The headlines, of course, reflect the targeted readership of the particular publication. On the basis that their readership is generally not a theatre-going one and therefore enticement is required to titillate readers into attending to a review of an RSC production, one might expect, from **The Bicester Advertiser**, for example SOME OF THOSE LUVVIES CAN BE TOUGHIES TOO. It is more surprising to note the plethora of innuendo exhibited in the broadsheets, although, in the light of the C/conservatism of the **Daily** and **The Sunday Telegraph** such prurient pointers to a production which contains nudity and therefore might antagonise defenders of 'traditional' Shakespeare are explainable. **The Daily**

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[3]Not only indicated by the presentation of the written responses, but with an audience 'normally very co-operative with questionnaires' (Sterling), out of the 200 placed on seats before the beginning of the performance, only 32 were returned.

[4]Procured by the marketing department of the RSC. They are **The Guardian** - Billington (25.7.96); **The Independent** - Taylor (26.7.96); **The Independent on Sunday** - Butler (28.7.96); **The Times** - Nightingale (26.7.96); **The Sunday Times** - Hewison,(28. 7.96); **The Daily Telegraph** - Langton (26.7.96); **The Sunday Telegraph** - Gross, (28.7.96); **The Financial Times** - Macaulay (26.7.96); **The Observer** - Coveney (28.7.96); **The Evening Standard** - de Jong (26.7.96); **The Daily Mail** - anon (27.7.96); **The Mail on Sunday** - Hughes (4.8.96); **The Glasgow Herald** - Woddis (31.7.96); **Time Out** - Grant (31.7.96); **The Stage** - Fitzgerald (1.8.96); **New Statesman** - Ratcliffe (2.8.96); **Theatre** - Newman (Sept/Oct 96) **LOCAL NEWSPAPERS: The Stratford Herald** - Lapworth (2.8.96) **The Stratford Standard** - Green (3.8.96); **The Stratford Express and Star** - Rhodes (24.7.96);**The Stratford Evening Telegraph** - McMullin,(26.7.96); **The Bicester Advertiser** - Barrington (8.8.96); **The Northampton Chronicle and Echo** - Dunmore (21.8.96); **The Nuneaton Evening News** - anon (26.7.96); **The Post** - Edmonds (26.7.96)

[5]Foucault, Michel, **The Foucault Reader,** ed. Paul Rabinov (Penguin,1986)

Telegraph delivers SLEAZE, DISEASE AND BARE-FACED CHEEK and from **The Sunday Telegraph** we have BARE BUTTOCKS GALORE AND THAT'S ONLY THE SHAKESPEARE.

The Independent On Sunday's TRIUMPH FOR THE WRONG CAMP is the only broadsheet to proclaim specific homo-erotic territory in its headline, which like the majority of other reviews, is an area explored in the body of the text. The reader is firmly launched into this terrain by the first sentence in Gore-Langton's **Telegraph** review - 'Judge's approach is as camp as a row of Greek tents' which exhibits a subtle demarcation of potential offence-taking. For newspapers such as **The Telegraph,** it is apparently permissible for the content of the review to contain any amount of homosexual innuendo and/or homophobia, but no direct reference can be proclaimed in the headline, which retains a McGill, sea-side postcard preoccupation with buttocks ('disease' is lightened by rhyming it with 'sleaze'.) The distinction between flavour of headline and flavour of content (the *tone* is similar) can partly be explained by the practice of either editor or sub-editor adding the headline once the reviewer has submitted his piece, so directly investing the headline with the socio-political character of that publication.

The Evening Standard, with its clumsily displayed headline TOO-JOLLY CAMP TALE OF MEN AT WAR, shows no such reticence or split between headline and review. De Jongh doggedly develops the predictable puns as follows; 'There's an excessive air of holiday camp - I refer not to Butlins but to Mykonos, the gay-friendly Greek island in the sun.' Although **The Times'** effort - THE LOVE OF WAR IN A LUST CAUSE - is not a specifically homosexual reference, Benedict Nightingale launches himself into an ambiguous sexual arena straight away with ' I have never seen so many jockstraps, rippling pectorals and rolling buttocks on a classical stage. At times the Trojan war might be the Battle of the Chippendales.' To upgrade the tabloid style he adds a titbit of literary initial-dropping - 'I do not think that Will, even when in hot pursuit of Mr W.H. would altogether approve.'

There is one other publication that stresses overt sexuality in its headline. **The Northampton Chronicle and Echo** has as its caption ELOQUENT DRAMA BUCKS THE TREND. The pun on 'buck' - i.e. a wild animal (male) - plus the assonant association of 'fucks'[6] is indexed by the large accompanying photograph of Fiennes and Hamilton embracing, with Fiennes as protector/dominator. The connotation of image and caption combination - that the heterosexuality of Troilus stands out among his homosexual fellow soldiers - is not alluded to in Dunmore's 'review' which is little more than a cast list. What is indicated in this situation is that the sub-editor crudely paraphrased 'the production...goes against the trend and lifts the lovers into tragedy' from the review text in order to grab the attention of the reluctant reader and direct his eyes towards the advertisements at the bottom of the photograph.

There are several explanations for the homoerotic emphasis of the press reaction. The obvious one is Shakespeare's text. Jan Kott's essay on the play opens:

> To start with there is the *buffo* tone. The great Achilles, the heroic Achilles, wallows in bed with his male tart, Patroclus. He is homosexual, he is boastful, stupid and quarrelsome.[7]

but the homosexual relationship is only one element of the text - weaving in and out of the foreground with the relationship of the eponymous 'hero' and 'heroine'. It is actually Troilus who imagines how with Cressida he 'may *wallow* in the lily beds/Propos'd for the deserver' (111, ii, 11)[8]. I do not propose crudely to polarise

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[6]One definition of the verb 'to buck' is 1530 'to copulate with; said of male rabbits, etc.' (The ShorterOxford English Dictionary, 1973)

[7]Kott, Jan. **Shakespeare Our Contemporary**. *Amazing and Modern*. Methuen 1964, p. 61.

[8]For a development of the 'dominant poetic image' argument - Troilus as warrior/lover, see Farnham, *Troilus in Shapes of Infinite Desire*. Shakespeare: Troilus and Cressida, ed. Martin, P. MacMillan, London, 1976. pp.132-141

sexuality - it is arguably the fusion of both homo and heterosexual orientation, (together with the cynical attitude to war and heroism) which gives this play its contemporary appeal. I am instead exploring why so much of the press reception focused on the homoerotic visual imagery of this production and how that message was transmitted.

Near nudity is not a new idea for this play. In the Stratford 1968 Barton/O'Brien production, Cressida was naked in one scene and the bodies of the warriors were oiled and scarcely clothed. In 1969, the Danish production sported 'a half-naked...young, strikingly beautiful ...Helen'.[9] Nearly twenty years later it is surprising that it is worthy of comment, but to quote only two publications: Steve Grant in **Time Out:**

> ..This particular battlefield is a homoerotic playground of laddish boasting, bursting thongs, shining pectorals, wobbling buttocks, rock-star leather, all-male snogging and (if you're Helen) instant orgasm.[10]

And Hewison in **The Sunday Times**

> The prevailing tone of ...Deirdre Clancy's costumes is one of those gladiator movies. Male buttocks and pectorals are much in evidence and the general air of camp has spread even to senior figures.....if that is 'the best classical theatre', God help us.

It appears to be the bodies of the actors as much as what they wear that invites comment. In the course of her interview, Deirdre Clancy offers a robust defence for her costumic response to the text. In reply to the interviewer's observation that a large majority of audience questionnaires revealed that the spectator preferred 'costumes to

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[9]Director Erling Schroeder. Royal Theatre of Copenhagen 1969. Described in **Shakespeare Around The Globe**. ed. Leiter. Greenwood Press, 1986 p. 750
[10]For all quotations from theatre reviews, refer to footnote 3.

be of a recognisable period'[11] she agreed that period costume is mythologised. ("Are we talking about Elizabethan fashion or Ancient Greek 'as it really was' or Shakespeare's idea of ancient Greek, or our idea of Shakespeare's idea....?") This was her pronounced 'agenda for the costumes', further illustrating that the bodies were as dominant a concern as what was or was not worn on them.

> It's a fantastically sexy play. It really is an unbelievably homoerotic piece. You cannot read it without being affected by the open homosexuality. Achilles and Patroclus are literally dying from too much sex. And there's Pandarus dying of an AIDS-like disease at the end. I found it shocking and I found the only way to do it was to go with the outrage. My response was very similar to working on Bond's **Early Morning** when I was twenty-three. It was alien to my thought processes, but far from being embarrassed and typecasting myself as a middle aged lady designer, I went the other way and the drawings were very sexy and very beautiful.

How did the actors respond to the drawings for *Troilus*?

> Terrified. Absolutely terrified. They thought, "Oh my God, we've got to show our bottoms!" and "How am I supposed to have a body like that?" They were much more self conscious about it than the females.

Presumably they worked out at the gym?

> Yes, most of them did. And there were some very good bodies on display.

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[11]See Appendix B, pp. 197,198. This study relates to **The Cherry Orchard**, but it was a general question."Do you prefer costume to be in the 'correct' period? Why/Why not?"

I thought it was very witty. The first sight of the Trojans on their march past was so wonderfully self regarding and preening. It had all the tension of a display of gym-trimmed bodies at a gay sauna.

Exactly. But of course none of the characters would consider themselves homosexual. They were just incredibly hyped up from the war - and eating all that meat - and they screwed anything that was available. In fact the one great love story is really Achilles and Patroclus.

And yet you put Jeremy Sheffield (Patroclus) - the most beautiful member of the cast - in a skirt.

Well, of course. He's a dancer so he wore it beautifully. The black leather sarongs became a huge success. You just had to be sure they hung from the hip and not the waist. Working with a homosexual director, I felt the interpretation needed the balance of my female heterosexuality.

And you put the wit into it.

I'm glad you got that out of it, because I found a lot of it very funny.

I saw the show twice and it interests me that at the end of the Stratford run, the male bodies were more covered than at the beginning. Were you involved with that decision?

Not at all. But I wouldn't have objected because in the first instance I thought a lot of the nudity or near-nudity was unnecessary. I was pleased with the look of the costumes because they were quite brave, but where people felt uncomfortable being relatively naked, then I had

no problem about them wearing more clothes. There was no agenda about not wearing trousers.[12]

Clancy is clear about those ideas she feels need to be brought out by what the (particularly male) characters wear, what sort of bodies they have and how they are exhibited and how, for example, a skirt, should hang on a male body. We have noted that Gunter is less specific and less pro-active. He is prepared to allow any post-production statement of intention to accord with a wide variety of interpretation. But both Clancy and Gunter agree that the costumes and the set shouldn't necessarily 'say' the same thing. Gunter is to the point: 'As long as the controversy between them is worked out, then I think it's more interesting not to merely underline', whereas, possibly because of the tone of the question, Clancy's response is both more defensive and more detailed - particularly in the development of the theory about location versus costume. We had discussed how some productions can be 'costume-led' - such as by Sue Blane's costumes for **The Rocky Horror Show** or her own costumes for **Tales of Hoffman.**[13] She was asked how she would describe, in terms of visual weighting, the relationship between the set design and the costumes in **Troilus and Cressida.**

Pretty even I would say.

Really? Because as a spectator, I felt that the set and the costume were saying quite different things...

What's wrong with that? I like there to be to a creative tension. I actually like putting costumes in a different period from the set. Not only is it exciting because it's unexpected but it actually has a greater

[12]E.P. interview, Appendix A, pp. 45, 46
[13]Houston Grand Opera U.S.A. 1992. Set design; Tim Goodchild, Dir: Ian Judge. Appendix A, p. 39

> realism because the location invariably pre-dates what people are wearing. The idea of an eighteenth century costume in an eighteenth century house is neither interesting nor accurate. Secondly - it can, as with John (Gunter) and me - be a matter of our having different temperaments. And then, perhaps most pertinently, employing this creative tension allows the two aspects of the text to be pointed up - the costumes indicate the sexier, fun side of this war, whereas John's set was deliberately grimmer and more sombre. I think that the combination is entirely appropriate.[14]

No press review advances any observation on the deliberate tension set up between the set and the costumes. In fact, the conflicting images, if they are commented on at all, are bracketed together as in **The Glasgow Herald**.

> Even the *usually reliable* John Gunter and Deirdre Clancy come up with sets and costumes of bombastic overstatement (a vast shield and over- hanging sun, loads of crotch rubber and bare bums) or just plain ugly variations on classical themes.

To fill the critical gap, this spectator is prepared to offer the opinion that although Clancy's theory suggests an interesting visual clash entirely in the spirit of a contemporary postmodern aesthetic, the set was too portentous, leaden and conventional to properly release the 'sexier, fun' quality of the costumes. For example, the area downstage left was entirely taken up by a huge emblem of shield and spears that was merely decorative. The shield's presence was justified aesthetically to balance the diagonal slicing of what most designers acknowledge is a difficult space,[15] and because the wall was so dominating, the size of the wall needed to be complimented by the size of the shield. But it had no resonance as an object. Its metonymic function,

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[14]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 41

[15]See Gunter's comments about the RST stage. Appendix A, p. 104 and Fielding's, Appendix A, p. 92

shield and spears = ancient warfare, is a tired old trope; it was in no sense practical and the actors were barred from using that part of the performing space. Another problem was the lumbering, noisy scene changes. Gunter states his intention and gallantly acknowledges that it failed. It was put to Gunter that;

> **From a technical and aesthetic point of view, I had a problem with the tower trucking in and out. The set had the characteristics of a unit set and then suddenly we had a scene change in the sense that 'scenery' came on. Presumably the tower was rather noisy to operate as its manoeuvrings were always covered by pre-recorded musak.**
>
> The tower was there as a means of dealing with the many, many domestic scenes in the play. Shakespeare was obviously writing the warriors return scene with a balcony in mind.
>
> **But the balcony of the tower is another public space really, isn't it? - rather than a private.**
>
> What it does do is to shut off enough of that huge area in order to contain a more domestic or personal space.[16]

The sense of shutting off and blocking up space ('for the Paris/Helen scene, we used drapes to block off the wall...') worked against any sense of scenographic flow. A contemporary audience familiar with, for example, the work of **Cheek by Jowl,** now takes for granted an elision of location by overlapping scenes. The pre-recorded music to cover 'scene changes' harked back to a 1950s style of production and although no curtain was lowered the musical 'disguise' was equally distracting. The unfolding of location was in complete contrast to the style advocated by Koltai in his

[16] E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 108

design for the 1985 RSC production of the play.[17] Koltai's permanent set was a dilapidated country house 'the location intentionally ambiguous: a manor house realistic in impression but not actually so'.[18] In a **Guardian** interview about his design for this production, Koltai explained how he likes to let an audience participate in scene changes, giving them transformations that are interesting to watch:

> If an audience can participate in a transformation they will think quite minimal changes are wonderful. The moment you use a curtain, unless what you reveal for the next scene is amazingly different, they will say 'Is that *all*? What have you been doing for the last quarter of an hour...?[19]

Although Gunter's intention can be applauded, 'We wanted as many entrances as possible for Pandarus and for Thersites who could be voyeurs from both above and below', the realisation was clumsy. Thersites was frequently placed halfway down the forestage steps, facing upstage so preventing the spectator from seeing the voyeur's facial expression.

> To be quite honest, I think that particular production was over-designed. It was my intention to examine that space - to find a way of cutting across that (proscenium) arch. Then there were the two

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[17]RST. Dir: Howard Davies.
[18]Goodwin. p. 31. Koltai's statement of intention.
[19]**The Guardian**. Lynne Truss interview. *Keep the Curtain Up.* 24 June 1985. Koltai speaks of the problem 'of the general lack of appreciation of design in (British) theatre, and of the low esteem in which the designer is held both by public and management. One has had for too long the feeling that it doesn't matter how long you work in this field, and how much experience you have, and how many awards you have won; finally you are still the tea boy. I am beginning to think I will still be the tea boy when I am eighty.' See chapter five for development of the hierarchical organisation of theatre production.

factions. How do you do it? Do you have separate locations? And then, of course, there are the domestic scenes to contain.[20]

It was not only the noise and apparent weight of the set that was problematic, but how it was used. Gunter was asked whether, apart from providing the variety of exits, he had any say in how the set was used by the actors?

For example, the first half was very formally and operatically "blocked" wasn't it?

That's very much Ian's style.

And that huge, imposing, upstage door. That was used only once in the first half and that was for a very laborious entrance of the table. Was that a technical problem?

Yes I'm afraid it was. It was intended to be for Priam's entrance.

But that was long after the table.

Yes. It happened in a way a lot of these things happen. Originally the design had no table - just chairs, but in the course of rehearsal, the table and the food were introduced to emphasise the family element.

What a good example of mis-appropriation of the designer's intention this is. As a result of an ASM's reahearsal notes, the wheels of the RSC workshop were put in motion to build a vast table, and although it subsequently blocked up an important entrance, the production juggernaut was unstoppable.

The press reviews either praise or ignore Gunter's set. I would suggest that it is the dull conventionality of it that makes a reviewer feel comfortable whereas the more

[20]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 108

challenging costume design is unsettling and therefore open to cheap jokes and ridicule. ('John Gunter's splendid set carries a corrugated iron hint of 20th-century wars in the patched walls of Troy *but*....there are more pectorals and buttocks on show than a convention of Chippendales' - **Stratford Herald**.) It would be an inappropriate assumption that a reviewer might be carrying over a memory of other Gunter sets - in particular the wit and exuberance of the RNT **Guys and Dolls** - and would therefore be reluctant to label the Troilus design as 'boring', because as we have noted in our study of reviews, as opposed to a director or actor, the corpus of a designer's work is unlikely to be familiar to a critic. Of the twenty-five reviews of this production, only twelve refer to the set at all, and of those twelve, three employ less than eight words. One, **The Nuneaton Evening News** (*Heartland Entertainments*) can be valued only for its embodiment of cliché. 'A simple but effective set....versatile enough to ring the changes.' All except two - **The Guardian** and **The Independent** - mention the flesh, if not the costumes.

The observations of the set design convey a general sense of relief that here is something clearly stated and safe to behold and describe. This is Nightingale in **The Times**:

> Where is the exhaustion, the dilapidation of a war that has, after all, been going on for seven enervating years? It is there in Gunter's marvellous set, mainly a vast metal wall, a grey patchwork of rumpled tin and corrugated iron with bumps and rills and patches of red paint.

and Coveney in **The Observer**:

> ... a stalemate beautifully suggested in John Gunter's design of a long, grey battered corridor of iron and crumbling plasterboard facing two totemic shields, one a floating circle in a blood-red sky, the other a standing oval in a forest of spears.

Only Ratcliffe in **The New Statesman** communicates the limitations of a rigidly architectural set design and how that rigidity influences performance. He is the only reviewer to indicate any understanding of the interrelated components of scenography - the set, how the set is used, the costumes and how they are worn, lighting and music.

> Judge works to an architectural design by John Gunter that absorbs the actors rather than setting them off, and imposes an awkward perspective on the moral debates that inform much of the action. Several of these are blocked end-on so that the visual elements of the argument remain unclear, and there is no narrative illumination from Simon Tapping's lighting design. Ian Kellam's pastoral Edwardian score burbles Eric Coatsily in the background, to quite another play.

I do not intend a detailed analysis of sound and lighting here, but as I have referred to sound in relation to scene changes, it is worth adding, as a correlation to Ratcliffe's opinion, Gunter's diplomatic rejoinder to the question of whether or not he agreed that sound design was important ('the contemporary definition of scenography contains the ways in which both lighting and sound fill the space') and whether he felt as I did, that the music was 'ingratiatingly sentimental and facile.'

> I couldn't agree more. Let's just say that wrong decisions were made which then couldn't be reversed. This is what makes theatre such a fascinating medium to work in. There are so many variables. No one can play the great Architect.[21]

The effect of Clive Francis's performance as Pandarus is a further explanation for the unified homo-erotic or more specifically, camp, press reception. His kaftan

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[21]E.P. interview. Appendix A, p. 110

evokes a common theme. 'Clive Francis, dressed and made up to look like Ko-Ko in "The Mikardo" ' (**The Financial Times**), 'looks as if he has wandered in from "The Mikado" '(**The Times**); 'a mincing Pandarus who appears from a production of "The Mikado" ' (**The Sunday Times**); 'Pandarus has to overcome an absurd Widow Twanky get-up' (**The Financial Times**). And his performance, both vocal and physical, gives licence for a tirade of jibes. 'The most artificial accent since Geraldine McKewan...a sour pantomime poof'. (**The Financial Times**); 'rasps his part like some grotesque pantomime dame'. (The **Telegraph**); 'a lipsticked, ear rings Clive Francis, sporting black ringlets and putting on his un-funny affected old man's voice, softens Pandarus into a comic turn under the vocal influence of Frankie Howerd'. (At the end of the play we see him) 'a diseased, half naked Pandarus *tottering* to oblivion'. (**The Evening Standard**); 'Francis seems to be imitating another Frankie altogether.' (**The Observer**); Francis is 'an outrageous camp old queen...all nodding winks and over emphasised speech.' (**The Glasgow Herald**). Once again it is only Ratcliffe in **The New Statesman** who gives credence to any intelligence informing the performance. Ratcliffe's set of theatrical antecedents relates to those quoted by Judge in the programme ('He's on his way to Lavache...having travelled through Touchstone and into a bleaker Feste. He's also the original bi-sexual.')

> Speaking the kind of genteel, gin-soaked and well-nicotined Stage Posh favoured on the English stage in the middle years of the century by stars such as Cicely Courtneidge, Beatrice Lilli and Douglas Bynge, this Pandarus draws on a rich store of slapped-up theatre and show-biz traditions.... Not only do we watch Pandarus begin to die, but he seems literally to turn (turn back?) into a woman before our eyes...

Ratcliffe beds Pandarus firmly into the Shakespearean tradition of the bi or transexual clown, the old theatrical trooper, and, literally, the camp follower.

The director's pre-production analysis of the scenography is at variance with both press and recorded spectator reception. Judge has his own vivid reading of the set, at this pre-rehearsal point, based on discussion with Gunter:

> The floor is a blood-soaked earth which crumbles away towards the front of the stage where it becomes a strange sulphurous pit in which to sit and spit and bitch.... We have a blazing red sky and a hanging disc of metallic sun.[22]

The disc and red light are there in the production but despite two separate experiences as a member of the audience (one in the circle where it is possible to see the floor of the stage, and one in the stalls where it is not[23]), and two viewings of the video recording, the floor, as described by Judge, is not evident. Was he perhaps subconsciously referring to the sandpit metaphor of Hurry's 1960 design for the play?[24] For whatever reason, such a floor did not materialise.

Judge's views on costume represent a nice reversal of intention versus realisation and bring us back to the homoerotic, camp arena. Judge, in the Elgin interview defends his decision not to 'make points about particular wars - both World Wars, Vietnam and so on 'and instead to 'do it in its historical period.' Rather than challenge Elgin as to what the question of 'historical period' actually means, Judge moves into an explanation of why the production should avoid

> ...a classicism which is in itself dangerous. There were Hollywood designers working on those epic films in the fifties who were so brilliant and had budgets so spectacular - that they have nailed that look for ever. If you send actors on stage with leather skirts and nice pectoral breastplates, they simply look like someone standing behind

[22]The RSC Magazine no.13 1996. *Tragical-Comical.* Ian Judge talks to Kathy Elgin. p.4

[23]Detailed research remains to be undertaken on how the reception of scenography is influenced by the physical positioning of the spectator

[24]Dir: Hall and Barton. Shakespeare Memorial Theatre Company

Richard Burton in **The Robe.** You don't connect to a classical world, you connect to the Hollywood understanding of what the classical world was.

Ironically, this negative predication is exactly the picture that is created. The actors *do* wear 'leather skirts and nice pectoral breastplates' and therefore, as he rightly predicts, the spectator does connect, if not to Hollywood specifically, to a self-conscious, fictionalised classicism expressed through 'slapped-up theatre and show-biz traditions.' (Ratcliffe)

The provenance of the director is the remaining major contributory factor to the reception of the 'look and feel' of the production. Ian Judge consistently attracts the epithet 'feel-good' - appropriate enough for musicals, West End comedy, light opera and the early Shakespeare comedies, (although Paul Taylor accused Judge of 'tipping a ton of icing sugar' over the RSC **A Christmas Carol** [25]) - but when it is applied to the direction of **Troilus and Cressida** it has a decidedly pejorative ring to it. 'Ian Judge.... could put the feel good factor in Oedipus Rex.' (**The Independent**); 'Ian Judge is the specialist in feel-good comedy, but how, one wondered would he tackle **Troilus and Cressida**?' (**The Guardian**); Woddis in **The Glasgow Herald** is more direct:

> Ian Judge's place in the RSC is a strange one. Invariably popular with the public, to critical eyes, his productions seem more like travesties, craven in their desire to please.

Judge's theatre directing credits, like all biographies and CVs, create their own narrative. They include several musicals: **Merrily We Roll Along,** (Guildhall and Bloomsbury Theatre); **Friends of Dorothy, How Lucky Can You Get?** (Donmar Warehouse); **Banana Ridge, One For The Pot, Peter Pan** (Shaw Festival, Canada);

[25] **The Independent,** 26.7.96

Musical Chairs, Oh Kay (Piccadilly Theatre) before joining the RSC to direct **Show Boat**. Then came the popular (in audience figure terms) and (with a few exceptions) critically acclaimed, **The Comedy of Errors** and **Love's Labour's Lost**. He has directed considerably more opera than he has plays and two thirds of that output could be labelled as 'light opera.' In a pre-production interview Kathy Elgin challenges Judge about 'being the RSC's Dr Feelgood' and that 'having established a reputation for popular success, some people might be surprised to find you directing a play like this'. Judge replied:

> I'm devoted to audiences and it's well known that my work is populist: sometimes there's a little smiley sneer on the critical face when they say that. But I have no apology for this...We have to do **Troilus and Cressida** because it's so utterly original, so startling, so deeply shocking and so very, very funny that we must draw the audience's attention to it.[26]

I have noted how the lack of wit in the set design fails to release the playfulness of the costume; similarly, what Judge considers to be 'very, very funny' - namely the performances of Francis as Pandarus and McCabe as Thersites - are laboured and fail to 'get laughs'. ('McCabe hams about with a posture suggesting serious groin strain.' - **The Daily Telegraph**; 'McCabe sends up the prologue for all it's worth.') Hewison in **The Sunday Times** implies a patronising trivialisation - 'Judge is saying 'Don't Worry, Shakespeare can be fun.'

The Bicester Advertiser reminds the reader that

> the bare flesh is perhaps not too surprising though, as director Ian Judge famously introduced four well muscled and scantily clad young

[26]The RSC Magazine no.13 1996, p. 2

men as light [sic] statues in his production of **La Belle Vivette** for English National Opera.

This neatly illustrates how the anticipation of a populist, theatrically camp production guides the perception of the theatre reviewer. History leads the critic to fulfil his own prophecy.

CRITIQUE OF A CRITIC:

Michael Billington's theatre reviews written for **The Guardian**. Shakespeare Productions between 1972 and 1991[27]

Designers are unified and yet generally non-specific in their condemnation of theatre critics' understanding of the function of design, so that in order to examine the validity of their case we should avoid falling into their generality trap. Instead I shall

[27]Billington, M. **One Night Stands. A Critic's View of Modern Brith Theatre.** Nick Hern Books, 1993

analyse the response of one particular critic, Michael Billington. I shall examine his appreciation of the function of scenography in productions of Shakespeare in Britain between 1972 and 1991 as revealed through his theatre reviews.

The review of the Marowitz **Othello** is a model statement of Billington's logocentric positioning at this stage of his career as a theatre critic and an indication that he frequently, probably unwittingly, sets himself in opposition to the audience of which he is a part. His initial statement - 'The crucial weakness is that many of the points Marowitz seeks to illustrate by a collage technique are inherent in the original text' surely misses the point. This is not the *original* Shakespeare text - Marowitz's deliberately moves away from the original - and so the scenography should not be judged on the basis of it tautologically re-stating the ('original') written text. Reference to the 'original' can only be by allusion. He is patronisingly tolerant of the intellectual intention of Marowitz - 'I'm all for Marowitz using Shakespeare's text as a springboard...' but his final sentence is indicative of a blinkered perception of the scenographic component of what was a notable early example of theatrical deconstruction - conceived and presented primarily as a series of visual images.

> But, *though* the production is visually deft and theatrically captivating, it still doesn't yield any insights into ...the Shakespearean sub-text.[28]

Here Billington exhibits his 'predominately white, male, middle-aged, middle-class and Oxbridge educated' persona in his assumption that a young, black (etc) spectator would be so familiar with the source text that s/he would (a) be opposed to the visual metaphors offering up an intertextual relationship to the source text or would (b) position an exploration of the sub-text of the original as a production value dominant over a 'theatrically captivating' show. He thus mis-places himself as a representative voice of the audience at the Open Space - one of the pioneer London Fringe venues

[28]Billington, p.17 Open Space, June 1972. Dir. and des.: Charles Marowitz.

recognised in the early 1970s for alternative work appealing to what was then a new, predominantly young, audience.

The review of the Hall/Bury **The Tempest** is an anti-design case study. Billington uses epithets such as 'vulgarly spectacular,' 'culinary' 'primitive chic' and 'decorative philistinism'. He asks a key rhetorical question but then is insecure enough to feel he has to provide his own answer; 'Is this literary puritanism on my part? I don't think so.'[29]

The armoury of verbal imagery piled up to wage war on the visual images presented to him are a clear indication of Billington's sense of outrage. Ariel is 'an ambisextrous, quick-change counter-tenor going up and down on a docker's pulley', and Prospero's magic vision is a 'grotesque revel graced by a Sabrina-breasted Juno. *In fact the weakness of the production is that one can only discuss it in terms of its images.*' Prescriptively, Billington informs us that **The Tempest** is a play and not '...a lush visual extravaganza.' The review ends with the unsubtle inverted aphorism and a confusion between fact and opinion'. There is infinitely less in this production, *in fact,* than meets the eye.'

It would have been interesting to read a Billington review of Strehler's production, but Billington's conversion to European productions of Shakespeare is too late for the1978 **The Tempest** directed by Georgio Strehler and designed by Luciano Damiani, (although it continued in repertory for ten years.) This heralded production pivoted on the concept that Prospero's magic is almost entirely visual; Strehler expressed his visions entirely as stage effects. And Billington has never made the cross-over to film, but what, twenty years later, would he have made of either Derek Jarman's film of **The Tempest** or Greenaway's adaptation, **Prospero's Books**? Would he still consider it a 'weakness..... that one can only discuss it in terms of its images.'?

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[29]ibid p. 48 **The Tempest**. Old Vic, 1974. Dir: Peter Hall, Des: John Bury.

The review of **King John** borders on the 'simple but effective' cliché:

> John Napier's sets with their traverse curtains and emblematic props, combine simplicity and fluency.[30]

Emblematic in what way? How did the curtains work? This is the only mention in the review that the adaptation was performed in the traverse, a staging which surely renders performance style and direction worthy of comment.

With Brook's **Timon of Athens**, Billington is on surer ground because he can observe and describe the interior of the building itself. 'The peeling, grey walls are flecked with white stains that look like eagle-sized bird-droppings...' Although he admires 'Brook's ability to give ...ideas exciting theatrical flesh', there are several examples of his confusion between the vocabulary of verbal and visual imagery:

> ...in one scene Brook embodies nearly all the key images of the play; ...dreaming, careless pleasure; the retribution awaiting the over-secure man.[31]

How? These are poetic, thematic images perhaps, but he does not explain how they are or might be scenographic, or were they embodied in the performance? It leads us to suspect Billington's prescriptive 'key requisite' in the following quotation. Is he advocating the tautologous underlining of the written text that designers are so sceptical about?

> Brook, in fact combines great respect for language with the knack of *creating images in harmony with the text:* the key requisite of any first-rate Shakespearean director.[32] (my italics)

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[30]ibid p. 49 **King John**. RST 1974. Dir: John Barton, Des: John Napier.
[31]ibid p. 56 **Timon of Athens**, Bouffes du Nord, Paris. Dir: Brook, Des: Launay, 1974

Billington is obviously influenced by the New Criticism current when he was at Oxford University - in particular Wilson Knight's interpretation of Shakespeare's plays as symbolic, quasi-religious rituals calling for productions which should find one or a few encapsulating images to embrace the 'meaning' of the whole play.[33] This is in direct contravention to Svoboda's view of the function of scenography:

> I do not think it is necessary to underline in the (design) that which the drama expresses already in an adequately clear manner. When I sense that something is sufficiently and well said, I don't concern myself with it. (A scenographer should not) strive to advance through the image everything that is meant by the piece, all its atmosphere, even revealing the outcome of the drama.[34]

The 1976, RSC **Macbeth**[35] was a landmark production in terms of maximising the potential of a chamber space. How the organisation of the space released the power of this small-scale, intimate Shakespeare production is allocated one short sentence by Billington, although there were some theatre critics who *did* pick up on the significance of the arrangement of performer/spectator. Cushman analysed the effect of the placing of actors as spectators around the circular acting area to allow the spectator a double perspective of, for example, Macduff watching his own family being butchered.[36] But Billington, although he understands performance styles, albeit expressed through quotation, ('If I had to pick the key to (Mckellen's) performance, I would say it lay in the line about making "our faces vizards to our hearts"') and he consistently, we might say laudably, perceives theatre

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[32]Billington, p.56
[33]Knight, W. **The Wheel of Fire**, 1930, p. 37.
[34]Bablet, 1970, p. 48
[35]R.S.C. The Other Place, 1976. Dir: Nunn Des: Napier
[36]**The Observer**, 12 Sept 1976

production within a moral and political framework,[37] he personifies two major deficiencies in contemporary theatre criticism. These are a lack of appreciation of the dramatic funcion of design, together with an inability to understand the ordering of space.

Ordering of space, based on demarcation and differentiation, operates as the primary conveyer of meaning throughout all societies - as the cultural theorists Hodge and Kress emphasise:

> Of all the dimensions of the semiotic situation, the most fundamental is the physical relation of the (bodies of) the participants in space.[38]

And spatial organisation is the thesis of the French Marxist sociologist Henri Lefebvre in his **The Production of Space**;[39] but such an important component of production passes Billington by.

'Handsomely mounted' becomes a code for a 'dreary' production in the RNT **Julius Caesar**.[40] What might have been interesting would have been a debate on the spatial problems of the Olivier in establishing spectator/performer contact, but instead, we have 'some beautiful projection's on John Bury's screen and an omnipresent sense of opulent, respectable dullness'. If we agree with Stephen Daldry in the opening quotation that 'you can't divorce the design process from any other

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[37]Of Orton's **Entertaining Mr. Sloane,** at the Royal Court 1975; 'It represents an abnegnation of the Court's real function of taking the moral temperature of the age in which we live. And of Ayckbourn's **Absurd Person Singular (The Guardian,** 14 August, 1974) - 'As I see it, Ayckbourn is a left-wing writer using a right-wing form; and even if there is nothing strident, obvious or noisy about his socialism it is none the less apparent ...'

[38]Hodge, R. and Kress, G. **Social Semiotics**, Cambridge,1991, p. 52

[39]Henri Lefebvre trans. Nicholson-Smith, Blackwells, 1991, "Perhaps what have to be uncovered are as-yet concealed relations between space and language: perhaps the 'logicalness' intrinsic to articulated language operated from the start as a spaciality capable of bringing order to the qualatitive chaos (the practico-sensory realm) presented by the perception of things." See p. 17.

[40]Billington, p. 98, RNT Olivier, 1977, Dir: John Schlesinger, Des: John Bury.

process by which the show has been created' and we invest the process of *reading* the text with a similar methodology to that of creating the text, then the scenography deserves a critical weighting similar to the other components, rather than such a 'damning with faint praise'.

1977 is a watershed year for Billington. Peter Stein emerges as an enlightening influence on the critic. Significantly, Hermann, the designer with whom Stein worked throughout this decade, is never mentioned [41] and Billington feels the need to apologise to his English readers for his admiration of a Stein production **Exercises for Actors**:

> It sounds pretentious, but I remarked at the time on the power of a theatrical image to reach back into one's own memory of some earlier existence.

The conversion has a zealous Pauline feel to it. Seven months later, in an article entitled *Britain's Theatrical Chauvinism* [42] he makes 'a sample list' of the work ignored by the British. The work of all of the directors mentioned is highly visual and all of them work with innovative production teams; Robert Wilson...Eugenio Barba's Odin Theatre Group from Denmark, Goran Eriksson's **Parisian Life**, Roger Planchon's original plays, David Rabe... Peter Weiss.' etc. In his review of the British **Coriolanus** during the same month, he emphasises the distinction;'...it combines the imagistic power of Continental theatre with a very English respect for actors.'[43] What this precisely means is not altogether clear. Are we to assume that 'continental' actors are shown little respect and that the English do not understand the power of the image?

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[41]**The Guardian**. 7 March 1977. 'Peter Stein.'
[42]ibid 1 October 1977
[43]Billington, p.113. 21 October 1977. RST. Dir: Terry Hands, Des: Farrah.

By the end of the year, although there is no mention of the designer's name and no visual effects are attributed to him, two thirds of Billington's review of **Hamlet**[44] is dedicated to an analysis of the scenography. The change of emphasis has been achieved by the director of Taganka theatre, Lyubinov - a director whose work is characterised by close collaboration with the designer David Borovsky. Their carefully orchestrated *mises-en-scène* are highly textured. Real objects related metaphorically to the plays' themes are employed and then transformed by actors. (In **Crime and Punishment** [1983] Raskolnikov is pursued by a blood-stained door.) **Hamlet** was performed in Russian, so even if Billington was familiar with every line of the original, for this production he would inevitably be focusing on what he *saw* rather than what he *heard*. Eloquently he celebrates the multivalence and 'suggestive quality' of the 'dominant image':

> ..a vast mobile curtain woven out of wool [45] that either swivels round from a central point, advances menacingly forwards or traverses the stage, driving the characters before it. It can be anything; a place to hide behind, a castle wall, a protective cover. But its real power is to remind you that Elsinore is a police state and that walls have holes as well as ears.[46]

But still he feels the need to apologise for concentrating on the scenography. 'Coldly described, it may sound like a directorial gimmick....' It is striking 'even if one misses something of the play's political background...'

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[44]ibid. p.114. Palais de Chaillot Theatre, Paris. 1977. Taganka Theatre of Moscow. Dir: Yury Lyyubimov, Des: David Borovsky.

[45]Spencer Golub from Brown University states that it was a mobile woven *rope* curtain, re-used in **The Master and Margarita**. **(The Cambridge Guide to Theatre** 1995, p. 656) This quibble is pointed out to remind us of our running debate; while we acknowledge a limitlessly diverse series of associations drawn out from a reading of an image, some factual descriptions are plainly erroneous. What woven *wool* 'says' is completely different from what woven *rope* suggests.Which was it?

[46]Billington, p.114

For the first time in any of his reviews of Shakespeare productions, Billington refers to the power of visual metaphor - albeit negatively. In his objection to the 'key metaphor... the ever-open grave at the front of the stage' he has moved close to Svoboda's dictum - censuring the image on the basis that 'it is sufficiently obvious **Hamlet** is a play about death without our having to be incessantly reminded of the fact.'

The stable single image versus mutation of metaphor debate is subtly contained in his **Henry V1** review. He notes, and by implication, applauds that 'he (i.e. Terry Hands - still no credit to Farrah, the designer), has not used an 'overpowering' single image for the three plays, like the diamond-shaped council table that 'dominated' **The Wars of the Roses**:

> ... he has, both here and on the Continent, evolved a style that admirably suits chronicle plays. It's based on a minimal setting, roving spotlights and a bold, frontal style of playing that gives the actors a chance to establish direct lines of contact with the audience.[47]

Finally Billington has engaged with the manner in which scenography affects performance style and the spectator/performer relationship. And his analysis of the metaphoric function of the green turf and rope in Part Two is a milestone of awareness:

> Played on a stretch of green turf, it begins with the crowd contained behind a rope at the back of the stage and the nobles assembled in columns. And what we see is the people bursting on the green in the Jack Cade rebellion like spectators invading the pitch at

[47]ibid p.120. **Henry V1**. RSC Aldwych.1978. Dir: Hands, Des: Farrah

> Lords and the nobles reduced to savage animalistic clusters; it's a perfect metaphor for a play which is, literally, about breaking ranks.[48]

Kennedy opens his book with a description of the RSC, 1978 **Taming of The Shrew**. A drunk climbs onto the stage out of the audience and proceeds to demolish the decorous, Serlio-style, *trompe l'oeil* set. Kennedy uses the Bognanov/Dyer production as an example of scenography being used

> ...not only to establish environment and atmosphere but also to create a complicated theatrical signifier of its thematic approach.....Most productions use stage and costume design to comment on the play, as a guide to the interpretative treatment; this one, by showing us at the start a set that was subsequently rejected, added a view of what it might have been, but deliberately was not....thus the demolition of the *trompe l'oeil* scene at the start was also a demolition of the facile view of the play, that tendency of many productions to treat it as a delightful *commedia* romp, glossing over its jagged edges, ignoring its challenges for late twentieth-century society, avoiding the contradictions within the text itself.[49]

Billington shows no evidence of responding 'to the strategy which required the audience to deconstruct the visual text in their minds, for in order to understand the meaning of the production it was necessary to understand the oppositional meaning of the two sets.' [50]

This is Billington's reading of the opening of the production. This is what he *saw*:

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[48]ibid p.121

[49]**Looking at Shakespeare** Cambridge, 1993, p. 3; see also, for analysis of the scenography, G. Holderness in **The Taming of the Shrew,** Shakespeare in Performance series. (Manchester, 1989), pp. 73-94

[50]ibid

A surly yobbo starts a row with an usherette in the front stalls. 'I'm not having any bloody woman tell me what to do', he cries. He then scrambles drunkenly on to the Stratford stage, pulling down banisters and toppling pillars like some beserk Samson. Lights explode; the stage fills with harassed back-stage staff; and gullible patrons start making for the exit to call the police.[51]

Billington has failed to appreciate the potential of scenography to layer meaning and to present alternative readings in the manner of, for example, the opposing endings of Brecht's **Der Jasager** *Lehrstücke* or the novelist's technique of the unreliable narrator.

The only reference to scenography in the review of **Love's Labour's Lost** (RST, Barton/Koltai 1978) is whimsically descriptive; '...the leaves were just beginning to fall from Ralph Koltai's trees, there is a slight nip in the air...'[52] In the light of the landmark Koltai design[53] for **As You Like It** - (another Shakespearean forest) Billington's non-analytical style is frustrating. Compare Billington **(The Guardian)** with Peter Lewis **(The Daily Mail)**[54] for scenographic appreciation and understanding. Lewis is referring to the hanging plexiglass tubes and abstract metal cut-outs which comprised Arden. It was, he felt,

> ...so different, so strange, so visually and aurally hypnotic, that the fact that all the girls are really men takes its place as merely one of the elements in a dream-like total experience.

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[51]Billington p. 123
[52]ibid p.125
[53]Christopher Morley's design for the same play for the RSC five years later (Dir: Buzz Goodbody) 'with hundreds of metal tubes hanging from the flies, was an obvious allusion to Koltai's design, an example on the visual level of how self-reflexive British Shakespeare production can be.' (Kennedy, p. 259)
[54]4 October, 1967

Lewis's observation - in a tabloid - conveniently knocks on the head any suggestion that a daily newspaper cannot be expected to provide an attempt at serious analysis of theatre productions.

No scenography - even Koltai's - can rise above the mediocrity and lack-lustre acting of a supporting cast, as we can divine from Billington 's review of **Richard 111** (Olivier. Director-Morahan. 1979) where epithets such as 'serviceable', blankly interchangeable' and 'nothing startlingly memorable' are scattered generously. The same applies to the O'Toole **Macbeth** (Old Vic 1980. Director Bryan Forbes) described as 'barnstorming actor-manager Shakespeare...filled with prolonged Irvingesque blackouts between scenes...Peter O'Toole as about as subtle as a battering-ram ...

John Napier, in his unit set design ('a pillared Victorian conservatory') for **All's Well That Ends Well** is credited by Billington as providing 'a binding emotional reality', showing that, as Gunter has suggested,[55] the potential of a single metaphor can be exploited to be capable of embracing different worlds and of developing with the performance text. As in Guthrie's 1953 production,[56] costume and props are used to separate the two worlds of Shakespeare's text, although other visual references, again as in Guthrie's production, are deliberately eclectic. (Napier floats anachronistically between several periods.)

Antony Sher, the eponymous **Richard III**, describes in his **Year of The King** the literal unveiling of the model - 'or wedding cake, as he calls it':

> Bill. D. (designer, William Dudley) takes over, grinning like a magician at a children's party. He says the set is an almost exact replica

[55]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 102
[56]Not 1959 as Billington states. Dir: Guthrie, Des: Moiseiwitsch, Stratford, Ontario

of Worcester Cathedral but suggests we should also think of it as a city in miniature, a political anthill. He has been inspired by Queen Elizabeth's line ' Pitcher's have ears.' The tents on either side of the stage for the camps of Richard and Richmond will be like the mouths of Heaven and Hell in morality plays.[57]

Billington's finds Dudley's set, which 'even in the Bosworth scenes' retains its perpendicular side-walls and religious effigies', lacking in political resonance. He does not recognise any intended 'political anthil':

> It is a viable interpretation but it underplays the element of calculating power politics and makes the work more a mad mediaeval morality than a study of deviousness and brutal pragmatism.[58]

Once again, Billington displays his inability to appreciate visual multivalence of set design, implying that it should be underlining the text rather than providing a wider, reverberative, complimentary narrative. When he deals with aspects of production directly connected to acting, he is far more perspicacious. His observation of the complexity of the crutches as (literal) prop for Sher's Richard is penetrating. The development of the crutches and Sher's experimentation with them obsess both Sher and Dudley and feature strongly in Sher's book.[59] He is either euphorically poetic:

> Spreading the crutches sideways, I look like some weird bird or giant insect. The wing-span - Richard's reach - is enormous and threatening. The range of movement is endless; backward dancing movements like

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[57]Sher, A. **The Year of the King**. Methuen, London, 1985. p.169

[58]Billington, p. 219. **The Guardian** review 21 June 1984 of the RSC production at the RST. Dir: Bill Alexander.

[59]See Sher's sketches on p. 103 and 108. 'Crutches suggest war veteran as well' p. 122. 'We have all agreed that if they are going to work, (the crutches) must be employed early on as weapons.' (p.186) 'Simply by living on [the NHS crutches] they are a part of me now - with them I can turn on a sixpence and dance the old fandango. I think that if you pricked them they would probably bleed.' (p. 209)

> a spider, sideways like a crab. And you can cover distances very swiftly with that sweeping, scooping action, almost like rowing, the polio-afflicted legs being carried along underneath.....Today it is a triumph.[60]

or he is grounded by a sense of absurdity. Here his rehearsal hump is stuffed into a diving suit:

> Again I have to muster my courage and again feel immensely silly. Actually it *does* look silly today because I have to wear my specs and am trying to hold the script and crutches at the same time.[61]

What is notable is that Billington's response to the multivalent application of this particular prop mirrors the intention of both actor and designer:

> These crutches not only make him the fastest mover in the kingdom, they become a staff to beat Lady Anne's attendants, a phallic symbol to probe under her skirt, incisors to grip Hastings' threatened head, a sword to frighten recalcitrant children with, and a cross to betoken Richard's seeming saintliness. The result is twofold. Mr Sher's spindly legs, protuberant knees, bent frame, make him a symbol of pitiable deformity. At the same time he is a figure of active, energetic evil who can bound across a room in one leap to fix an enemy with a basilisk stare.[62]

Kennedy cites the RSC Bogdanov/Dyer **Romeo and Juliet**[63] as an effective realisation of 'Fourcauldian visions of the complexity of knowlege and power' which

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[60]Sher, p.166
[61]ibid
[62]Billington, p. 218. **The Guardian**, 21 June 1984
[63]1986, RST

'achieves a visual unity that post modernism normally avoids.'[64] The contemporisation of this particular text is traceable to Barry Jackson in 1925 and goes through **West Side Story** up to the 1997 Baz Lurmann film, with Nellee Hooper's accompanying rock band sound track. The targeting of textual content to a matching audience is by no means inevitable - an audience of psychopaths for **Richard III**, or geriatric land-owners for **King Lear**, would obviously be absurd, but **Romeo and Juliet** is a play invariably perceived as accessible to young people; once it is appropriately packaged it tends to plug firmly into the youth market, particularly as Dudley points out:

> I just don't believe the maxim that an audience should never look at anything other than the actor's face - particularly a young audience because they are so much more visually educated than older people. They are used to extracting information from visual stimuli very quickly.[65]

Billington, puritanically restates his Aristotelian position.[66] The converse argument that although he might *not* 'have truly enjoyed' a Shakespeare production which a director/designer team did *not* 'decorate', the experience would nevertheless be worthier and more culturally respectable:

> But though this is the first **Romeo and Juliet** in years that I have truly enjoyed, I have a nagging worry that the RSC is starting to decorate Shakespeare rather than explore him.....I simply temper my enthusiasm with a caution that one goes to Shakespeare at Stratford for text and

[64]Kennedy p. 296 and p. 300
[65]E.P.interview, Appendix A, p. 57
[66]Spectacle as the 'least artistic element' of a play. (Aristotle **Poetics**.) The translation and implication of *skeupoiòs* has been much debated, however. See Else, G.F. **Aristotle's Poetics; The Argument**. (Cambridge, Mass., 1957), p. 280

acting as well as an audacious directorial concept.[67]

The 'audacious' concept referred to is the ending of the production which drew attention to the power of the image in a manner discussed earlier in relation to the opening of Bogdanov's **The Taming of The Shrew.** This is Billington's description:

> And after the two lovers are safely dead ....they are instantly transformed into gold statues before which the survivors smilingly pose for the paparazzi.[68]

And this is Kennedy's analysis:

> After Juliet's death there was a long blackout with loud music; no more of Shakespeare's scene was heard. When the lights came up, the audience saw a public square, with a gold statue of the lovers mounted on a pedestal, and T.V cameramen and technicians milling about. Montague and Capulet arrived and stood apart. The Prince...forced Montague and Capulet to shake hands, and left. When the cameras stopped, the two fathers glared at one another and departed separately...(The image was) thoroughly manipulated... the media gave the illusion of peace but it was only an illusion....Calling attention to the misuses of images in our world, ironically emphasising the complicity between mediated newspaper picture and politics, at the same time the director and designer presented a revisionist meaning for the play in visual terms. Like much of postmodern art, in the end the production questioned the value of images while capitulating to their power.[69]

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[67]Billington, p. 254. **The Guardian,** 10 April, 1986.
[68]ibid
[69]Kennedy pp. 298-330.

Billington's application of the verb 'to decorate' in the context of this production is demeaning, for he is reducing scenography to the anachronistic and pejorative term - 'décor' - an inadequate term for the deliberate weighting of the visual in this production.

In the reviews of the two Shakespeare productions that Billington saw on consecutive nights there is virtually no mention of set design or costume other than an intellectually snobbish, ('redbrick', 'new universities') casual insult - of a type that he does not allow himself to indulge in when he assesses performance:

> On the visual side, I was puzzled by one thing: the permanent surround Farrah has designed for the 1987 season. It looks like three sides of a redbrick courtyard in one of the new universities erected in the 1960s.[70]

Several designers have commented that there is no redress to the throw-away insult. William Dudley:

> You can't write a letter to correct (a critic) because then you'd be accused of being pretentious and obscure. So they never learn. There's no right of reply to the brickbats. For example, a critic suggested the other day that I had plagiarised some ideas from **Wind in the Willows** for my design of **Under Milk Wood** - it was in connection with the drum revolve. With no prompting from me, an actor in the cast wrote to that critic pointing out that when I designed **The Shaughraun** I had actually been the first person to use the drum revolve. That's an example of a casual insult to which I had no redress.[71]

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[70]Billington, p. 277. Review in **The Guardian,** 10 April 1987 of **Julius Caesar**. RSC at the RST. Dir: Terry Hands, Des: Farrah. 1987.
[71]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 61

The **Antony and Cleopatra**[72] he reviewed the following night was ecstatic. ('the most intelligently spoken Shakespeare I have heard in years', 'Judi Dench's breathtaking Cleopatra', 'Antony Hopkins' magnificent Anthony....') The scenography, however, is referred to only in parenthesis - a striking example of the theatre critics' reluctance or inability to apply the same analytical tools that they are prepared to employ in deciphering meanings in performance:

> What this means in practice is that the production - played in Jacobean costume against Alison Chitty's circular, blood-red surround with broken columns and fragmented porticoes - is about two chunkily real people living out some epic fantasy.[73]

Why Jacobean and not Roman/Egyptian costume? If it did, why did the circular surround work better than Farrah's three sided construction? Why the inevitable epithet, *blood*-red? What were the 'broken columns' communicating? Billington says earlier in the review, 'Peter Hall uncovers meanings in the text that may seem obvious but that have never hit one so penetratingly before', so it seems strange that Billington does not 'see' them - particularly as Hall refers specifically to this production as an example of the way he prefers to work with a designer - a method by which he feels the finest results can be achieved, with a design being created that is 'organic' rather than 'imposed'. On this production, Chitty was able to work with actors and the director for 'the luxury of twelve weeks rehearsal' before final decisions were made:

> The actors can then discover, with the director, the physical needs of the play; and the designer can, by watching the scenes develop, reach decisions about colour, atmosphere and texture. One of my happiest times in the theatre was directing the Judi Dench/Anthony Hopkins **Anthony and Cleopatra**. We had rehearsed for a month, with the

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[72]**Antony and Cleopatra**. RNT Olivier, 1987. Dir: Hall, Des: Chitty.
[73]Billington, p. 279

designer Allison Chitty, sketching obsessively, before any models were made or any costume decisions taken... Normally because of deadlines, budgeting, contractor's time and other pressures, the design has to be ready even before rehearsals begin, with a danger that it is not organic but imposed?[74]

The pattern established by Billington - that it is permissible to appreciate scenography wholeheartedly so long as the production is foreign - applies to his review of **Macbeth**.[75] 'In my whole theatregoing lifetime I have never seen a production as achingly beautiful as Yukino Ninagawa's **Macbeth**.' There is a stab at interpreting the images - 'the famous falling cherry-blossom *which symbolises mortality as well as beauty*' and at least he sees 'dominant images of a blood-red sun, a throne made out of embossed golden armour' (*blood*-red again.). For the first time he responds to the drawing of sound onto the scenographic map; 'On top of this, Ninagawa makes use of a throbbing, plangent score...' After the enthusiasm follows the inevitable qualification:

> But Nonagawa *is not simply presenting us with great pictures.* He has a *vision of the play* based on the transience of earthly power: The armoured throne sits on stage throughout, as part of a Buddhist altar, mocking those who vainly seek to occupy it (my italics).[76]

Billington is once again setting up the hegemony - the intellectual 'vision of the play' as a principal, with the pictures/images in subservient opposition. Surely the 'armoured throne' is concurrently both picture and 'vision of the play'? The duality is its strength.

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[74]Goodwin, Foreword by Peter Hall, p. 12
[75]RNT Lyttleton. September 1987
[76]Billington, p. 287

The RSC **Coriolanus** review receives barely a mention of set and costumes. This raises the question that perhaps there was nothing worth noting about it, but the equivalent, in terms of performance analysis, to Billington's short comment; Christopher Morley's set consisted of three mobile siege-towers' might well be 'There are four female parts in **Coriolanus**. Three of them begin with the letter V'. In the realms of a production's acting, psychology and politics, Billington would never show such insulting reticence and banality.

The review of the RSC **King Lear**[77] is interesting because we have Fielding's statement of intention. In the context of a general complaint relating to lack of inquiry about the meaning of set design and how communication can break down with a director, he says;

> Even when I did **Lear** for the RSC and I had a huge steel cube that revolved on stage, no one asked me what it was supposed to be.
>
> **And what was it supposed to be?**
>
> It was an expression of power - of the walled seat of power - an armoured fortress. Incidentally that was a classic example of the space not being used properly. The cube was meant to sit within a space with everything happening around it. The cube itself expressed the turmoil and anxiety at the centre of that society. It could have been a really interesting idea if it had been developed. I feel that if Nic (Hytner) had engaged me in a dialogue we could have made an interesting journey with it, but he cut off. He said it was fine and he could do the show with it, but whether he saw it as I intended, I really haven't the faintest idea.[78]

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[77]Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 1990. Dir: Nick Hytner, Des: David Fielding.
[78]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 91

Billington hails 'Mr Hytner' who 'to his credit treats **(King Lear)** as a tragi-comedy full of turbulent paradox'.

> You see this in David Fielding's excellent set ...a revolving, open-sided cube that during the storm scene gives on to a dizzying skyscape. Order opens up to reveal chaos.

The model has been destroyed and without having seen the production to make a mediating judgement about how the space was used, it is difficult to make further comment on the direct contradiction of intention and perception. For Fielding, the cube 'expressed turmoil and anxiety at the centre of that society', whereas for Billington it represented 'order'. It cannot simply be binned as a design failure due to lack of designer-director communication if a critic normally so insensitive to the function of design describes it as 'excellent' in its reification of 'turbulent paradox'.

In 1991 Billington reviews only one play of Shakespeare's - **Henry IV**. Noble and Crowley had combined to produce the **Henry VI** cycle, **The Plantagenets** in 1988. The high chiaroscuro lighting is characteristic of the neo-pictorial style adopted in the late eighties and spilling into the nineties with designers such as Fielding, Bjornson and McDonald who were working in opera as much as in theatre. Design in clothes, interiors, cars and restaurants (the list could extend) of the opulent style - conscious eighties has inevitably filtered through to theatre design. Kennedy makes a similar point to Marowitz, in his discussion of a 'new visual expression' for Shakespeare production in the eighties.[79]

> Emphasising the pageantry of the histories rather than their politics, the company departed further from the roughness of the Brechtian model towards a scenography that filled the stage with opulence.[80]

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[79]Marowitz, Charles **Kott, Our Contemporary**. *American Theatre*, Oct.1988: p. 100
[80]Kennedy p. 294

In his book, Billington prefaces each new year with a commentary on politics, the relative positions of commercial, subsidised and fringe theatre, funding for the arts and the state of new writing.[81] He does not enter into any debate about styles of production until his 1991 essay, *Shakespeare in Europe,* where he revisits the territory of Ninagawa's **Macbeth**. Basing his argument on Jürgen Flimm's production of **Twelfth Night,**[82] in which the sea dominated as central image, he feels that when 'you lose the English Language and context, you release the play's metaphorical power'.

> There is a gain as well as a loss in freeing Shakespeare from the rigorous explicitness of the English tongue. There is a mythical quality in his work which transcends language and may even be liberated by a foreign perspective.[83]

While we might applaud the widening of any critic's vision, there is an element of band-wagon jumping in the appreciation of German scenography. As we have noted in the Noble/Crowley 1988 **Henry V1** and the comments of McLeish and McDonald, elements had been adopted by British designers for some time - particularly the technique of lighting only the upstage area. (Billington - 'Another (advantage) is the continental philosophy of lighting which creates mystery by casting the forestage in shadow'.) John Gunter, himself a student of Ralph Koltai[84] explains some of the history and penetration of German influence:

> Working in Germany in the seventies, I realised that, mainly because they had so few new playwrights of their own at that time, they were looking at the classics in a totally new and revolutionary way. Not only did they have the vision, but they had the budgets to produce some

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[81]This he still does - note his recent 'Six Point Plan for Theatre'. **The Guardian** 16 July, 1997

[82]Hamburg 1991.

[83]Billington, p. 38

[84]Koltai, as head of design at what was then The Central School of Art from 1974-1982, also taught Maria Björnson, David Fielding and Sue Blane.

extraordinary work. This began to creep across the channel. I was head of design at Central by that time, so I encouraged the students to look at German theatre magazines. These contained very high quality photographs of the most fascinating designs and students were very influenced.[85]

What is surprising is Billington's approval and embrace of Zadek's work. Infamous for his iconoclasm and visual anarchy, usually realised by designer Peter Pabst (no mention of him by Billington), we might expect Zadek to represent all that Billington dislikes. His **Hamlet** was performed in an abandoned factory using a colloquial and deliberately coarse translation. Hamlet apparently 'drowned the audience in his idiosyncratic cascading declamation and revelled in mad action such as cutting up Polonius' corpse and throwing the dismembered carcass out of the window.'[86] Reacting from his grounding in English Literature from his Oxford University days, Zadek challenges the cultural high ground occupied by Shakespeare, pillaging the written text in order to create startling anarchic stage pictures. Zadek creates his own 'scenic stage language'[87] which is a long way from Cicely Berry and the RSC.

The productions of Zadek's discussed by Billington are his adaptations of **The Merchant of Venice** and **Measure For Measure,** presumably a revival of the Zadek/Minks production of 1967 for which Zadek wrote in the programme that he had decided 'at all costs only to stage the images arising in my imagination from reading the play.' Billington describes not a single aspect of the scenography of either production, concentrating entirely on thematic interpretation - Venice as Wall Street (psychologically rather than scenically) with Shylock as cool capitalist - or acting skills ('Huppert reminded us that great acting is something that almost transcends

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[85]E.P. interview, Appendix, p. 106
[86]Hortmann,Wilhelm. **Images of Shakespeare**. ed. Werner Habich etc. *Changing Modes in Hamlet Production: Rediscovering Shakespeare After the Iconoclasts.* Newark.1988, p. 224
[87]ibid

language'.) Billington consistently disappoints in his inability to assess any aspect of production other than these two components. Having taken as his examples of 'Shakespeare in Europe' two such highly visual directors as Flimm and Zadek, directors whose dominant form of expression is through images, it seems perverse not to address the function of the visual in his summing up. His final exhortation reads as luke warm lip service to an ill defined inter-culturalism:

> We cannot help but see Shakespeare in terms of our own language, history and culture; but we need urgently to widen that definition of culture not by doing ludicrous, down-market pop travesties of the plays but by working towards racially integrated productions.[88]

Finally, we can but find our critic guilty of the charges laid by theatre designers in the prevous chapter against not only him, but against the corpus of British theatre critics. As Daldry and McNeil state:

> They lack any visual vocabulary and they have no understanding of the craft or process involved.... There's often a literary sterility and predictability in theatre criticism. I worry that their terms of reference are so narrow.[89]

[88]Billington, p. 360
[89]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 123

Chapter 4

DECONSTRUCTING SCENOGRAPHY: FINDING THE LANGUAGE.

A CASE FOR CLASSICAL RHETORIC.

APPLICATION OF THE SYSTEM. An analysis of Berkoff's **Metamorphosis**

Up to this point in the thesis, (most notably in the second chapter), there has been a clear indication - celebration even – of the instability of meaning conveyed through scenography. Any attempt at systematic de-construction is doomed to frustration because of the paucity of tailored theoretical terminolology. Inevitably, to describe and analyse the 'bastard art form' is to borrow from a spectrum of literary and cultural theory, and to throw into the cooking pot tasty gobbets of art history theory such as iconography and pictorial representatonalism. The attraction of developing and applying classical rhetoric to scenography is that one discipline can embrace both intention and reception.

> Classical rhetoric survives... in journalism and publishing, on radio and television, in the theatre and cinema, the old names may or may not be known, but the tools continue to be used.[1]

Vickers' opening statement of his 'Defence' is: 'Rhetoric, the art of persuasive communication, has long been recognized as the systemization of natural eloquence.'[2] But the context is important. It follows a quotation from Shaw's **Pygmalion** (Act 11) where Professor Higgins equates Doolittle's 'natural gift of rhetoric' with his 'mendacity and dishonesty.'

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[1]McArthur, Tom (ed.) **The Oxford Companion to the English Language**. O.U.P. 1992, p. 866

[2]Vickers, Brian. **In Defence of Rhetoric**. O.U.P. 1988. Reprint 1997, p. 1

Alongside rhetoric as the study and practice of effective communication lie at least two more pejorative interpretations, both of which suggest a certain speciousness. One evokes the epithet 'empty' - implying an archaic and florid style devoid of content, and the other views rhetoric as 'the art of persuasion', (i.e. to the advantage of the persuader), such as in advertising.[3] It is worth bearing in mind the derogatory charges in an otherwise strong argument.

In our quest for developing a language which will serve to explain how scenography operates, inevitably we use figurative language - any analysis of set design invariably evokes the term *metaphor* - for how could our language be literal (if that is possible anyway) when the discourse focuses on image - on illusion and suggestion?

What I am proposing here is a methodology based on the rhetorical tropes and figures appropriate for this field of enquiry. The selection and application of these terms will assist towards the common objective of academic study in scenography, for our objective is 'to develop a critical language in which to articulate ideas in scenography'[4] or 'to contribute towards a new vocabulary in which to construct an aesthetic of scenography; this will recognise the diversity of disciplines deployed by scenographers and their varied reading by spectators.'[5]

I am indebted to David Lodge for embarking on this mode of analysis. In his chapter, *Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles*,[6] he draws on Roman Jakobson's theory

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[3]This shade of meaning is contained in the title **Rhetoric: The Wit of Persuasion** by Walter Nash. (Blackwell,1989)

[4]M.A. Course Document 1996. Wimbledon School of Art, p.4

[5]IFTR/FIRT Scenography Working Group document,1996. In the report of OISTAT (Organization Internationale des Scènographes, Techniciens et Architectes de Théâtre) of the Nov. 1995 Tel Aviv meeting, under 'old subjects,' is listed this 'Definition of Scenography' (Reitala, Lopez, Ptachkova.) Under 'future activities' number 7 is to 'Describe what is theory and what is history,' and number 9 is to 'Clarify a definition of scenography.' www.oistat.nl/Committees/working committees/His-theor- com/intelaviv.html

[6]Lodge, David. **The Modes of Modern Writing**. Arnold, 1977

that a great deal of cultural phenomena can be classified according to this distinction. Film has its own rhetoric which is essentially *metonymic* - the image of a fox following that of a man doing a business deal would indicate slyness[7] - and *synecdochic* - the close-up. But drama, Lodge, via Jakobson, argues, is metaphoric:

> When Jakobson says that drama is essentially 'metaphoric', he is clearly thinking of the generic character of dramatic art as it has manifested itself throughout the history of culture. Arising out of the religious ritual (in which a symbolic sacrifice was substituted for a real one) drama is correctly interpreted by its audience as being analogous to, rather than directly imitative of reality, and has attained its highest achievements (in classical Greece, in Elizabethan England, in neo classical France) by being poetic, using a language with a built-in emphasis on patterns of similarity and contrast.[8]

If the rhetorical figures *metaphor* and *metonymy* are essential vehicles for the communication of meaning in theatre, why stop there? What about all the other rhetorical devices employed (perhaps unconsciously) in literary, performed and visual theatre texts? The first problem to address is the distinction between a trope and a figure. Vickers' definition is helpful:

> A trope (or 'turn') involves a change or transference of meaning, and works on the conceptual level; the recognition, and appreciation, of a metaphor is a mental event. A figure involves the disposition or placing of [*images*] into a structure which is natural yet goes beyond the normal or minimum needs of communication.[9]

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[7]Harrington, John. **The Rhetoric of Film.** New York, 1973, p. 138
[8]Lodge, p. 81.
[9]Vickers, p. 315

By substituting **images** for **words** we can appropriate the whole schemata for the purposes of scenographic analysis.

A further problem may be that the process is perceived as one of mechanical term-spotting which fails to address any emotional or psychological content. In his chapter on 'The Expressive Function of Rhetorical Figures,' Vickers allays any fears that human energy might be wasted on an 'interminable enumeration of stylistic devices, an interest more concerned with the husks than the kernels of style.'[10] To support his thesis that rhetoric is not merely technique, but a means of communicating emotion, he focuses on the first century A.D. critic, Longinus who

> shares Aristotle's belief that the 'truth' of a rhetorical figure is attested by the reactions of the listener or reader, who compares its verbal form to his own utterances when under the influence of a similar emotion. Like other theorists of rhetoric he links the mimetic state to its communicative or self-reproductive power.....what sets him apart is his recognition of the functional relationship between figures and feeling.[11]

There are several rhetorical figures and tropes still in common currency - particularly in literary criticism -, which need no definition. The following might be referred to: *anachronism, anticlimax, antithesis, aporia, decorum, elipsis, emphasis, euphemism, hyperbole, inversion, irony, litotes, metaphor, metonymy, oxymoron, paradox, paronamasia* or *pun, periphrasis* or *circumlocution, personification* (or *prosopopopoeia), pleonasm* (or *tautology*) and *synecdoche.* There are some that, unless one has made a special study of rhetoric, might well be only partially familiar.

Some of the figures initially might appear unlikely as analytical tools applicable to scenography, but a close scrutiny will reveal their usefulness. Such an

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[10]Vickers is quoting from W.S. Howell 's **Logic and Rhetoric in England, 1500-1700.** Princeton, 1956, pp. 33-4

[11]Vickers, pp. 308 and 310

example is *aposiopesis* (*reticentia* in Latin). This refers to the breaking off of a sentence in mid-flow, which was recognised as a linguistic device. *Anacoluthia*, however, is more specific. Rather than leaving a statement hanging in mid-air, which is suggested by *aposiopesis*, the Greek *anakóluthon* means 'not in proper sequence'. *Anacoluthia* refers to a break signalling a change of direction, which, in a written text, is suggested by a dash:

> Ay! you did wish that I would make her turn.
> Sir, she can turn, and turn, and turn, and yet go on
> And turn again; and she can weep, sir, weep;
> And she's obedient. Proceed you in your tears.
> Concerning this, sir. - O well-painted passion!
> I am commanded home - get you away;
> I'll send for you anon - Sir, I obey the mandate
> And will return to Venice. - Hence, avaunt!
> (Exit Desdemona)
> Cassio shall have my place. And, sir tonight
> I do entreat that we may sup together.
> You are welcome, sir to Cyprus - Goats and monkeys!
> Exit.[12]

I quote the whole speech because it is such a striking example of both the symbiosis of form and meaning and of the expressive function of rhetoric. As in **King Lear** where there are comparable examples of *anacoluthia*, the break indicates a state of extreme agitation - madness even - where any measured logical progression of language would be wholly inadequate as a means of reflecting or communicating Othello's state of mind. In this speech, the repetition of 'and turn' (*polysyndeton)* and 'weep' (*anadiplosis* and *ploké*) introduces Othello's emotional confusion which then progresses towards inarticulacy. He interrupts himself - his thoughts shoot uncontrollably in several directions. Othello's mental disorientation is mirrored and

[12]Shakespeare, **Othello** IV, i.

refracted by the rhythmic, metric and syntactic dislocation. In the written text, the punctuation - the dash - breaks up the words on the page while the stage directions indicate yet another level of dislocation, that of the characters exiting in different directions to separate imagined offstage areas. First there is Desdemona's enforced exit one way ('I'll send for you anon....Hence, avaunt!') and then Othello's in another. ('I am commanded home').

How does this relate to scenography? A strikingly literal application of anacoluthon - sudden change in direction - is evident in Maria Bjornson's design for **Measure for Measure.**[13] She acknowledges the influence of Escher[14] and there are obvious visual links between his **Relativiteit**[15] and Bjornson's set design. There is the physical suggestion of Christian values in Escher's print - the laborious attempt to ascend to heaven and the ease and inevitability of descent. (The Fall of Man and/or Hell). This tension is contained within Bjornson's set. The moral labyrinth, the *aporia,* the shifts of plane, the ambiguities - this is the world of both Shakespeare's text and of Bjornson's.

Another example of how the term *anacoluthon* might be applied to scenography is Stephan Lazaridis's design for **The Taming of the Shrew.**[16] The intention with this set was to subvert the rules of classical perspective as Lazaridis explains:

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[13]**Measure for Measure**. Shakespeare RSC BT Tour, 1991
[14]**The Times.** Timothy Clarke talks to designer Maria Bjorson. 14 Sept., 1991
[15]See illustration, Appendix C, pp. 200-201
[16]**The Taming of the Shrew** Shakespeare. RSC 1987. Dir: Jonathan Miller. Design: Stephanos Lazaridis. Goodwin, p. 81. See illustration, Appendix C, p. 203

> The marquetry effect of the wooden set created different aspects of the perspective. The side walls concealed wooden panels which tracked on and off the stage, expanding and contracting the depth of space.[17]

The 'meaning' of the play text has altered and shimmered, particularly as a consequence of feminist readings. The perspective on Kate and her relationship with Petruchio is effectively perceived through multiple 'points of view', without danger of over-simplification. Depending on the lighting and the shuttering, the direction or viewpoint is changed - often suddenly.

Euphuism is a categorization appropriate for the reading of a design that contains elements of Ancient Classicism such as Nicholas Georgiadis' design for **Clemenza di Tito**.[18] Compare the definition of *euphuism* - 'an ornate prose style, filled with classical and Biblical allusions...' [19] to the designer's own statement about this work.

> This *opera seria* appears to reflect more the Enlightenment's obsession with ancient Rome than any historical reconstruction of the Rome of the Caesars. Therefore fragments of Roman statuary, as in an 18th century *cabinet d'antiquitiés*, seemed a relevant approach.[20]

As early as the sixteenth century, euphuism, as a prose style, was considered florid and over-ornate and was invoked usually as a parody. Holofernes, the school master pedant in Shakespeare's **Love's Labour's Lost** personifies the term in this epitome of empty rhetoric - maximum verbiage and minimum content:

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[17]Goodwin, John (ed.), **British Theatre Design,** Weidenfeld and Nicolson,1989, p. 81.
[18]**Clemenza di Tito** Mozart. Dir: Michael Cacoyannis, Des: Nicholas Giorgiardis. Aix-en-Province, 1988. Goodwin, p.132
[19]McArthur. Tom (ed.), **The Oxford Companion to the English Language**. O.U.P. 1992.
[20]Goodwin, p.132

> This is a gift that I have, simple, simple: a foolish extravagant spirit, full of forms, figures, shapes, objects, ideas, apprehensions, motions, revolutions.These are begot in the ventricle of memory, nourish'd in the womb of pia mater, and delivered upon the mellowing of occasion. But the gift is good in those in whom it is acute and I am thankful for it. (IV, iii)

Adrian Rees's design for **Shadowlands**[21] includes but goes beyond *euphuism*. Here the device is not straightforwardly parodic. Rees has devised a cross reference of exaggerated architectural classical features (the dwarfing stone pillars with climbing ivy), academia (the cloisters of Magdelen College, which like several other academic institutions constituting Oxford University, draws on classical allusion), and childlike fantasy (the Narnia figures). The thread that draws these *metonynic* visual concepts together is a biographical asceticism. C.S. Lewis had lived as a single man in Magdalen College for thirty years, and had become widely known for his religious and spiritual writings such as **The Problem of Pain** (1940). The altar effect achieved by the positioning of the 'high table' further combines the institutional and the religious.

Whether scenography can or should bear this wealth of detail is a problem raised by such an analysis and that is an issue resolvable only by witnessing how the performers inhabited the set and how vital was the relationship between set and oral realisation of the text. Here we are constantly frustrated, for unless we saw the production we can only surmise.[22] Nevertheless in this design, the separate

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[21]**Shadowlands** by William Nicholson. Belgrade Theatre, Coventry.1992. Dir: Rumu Sen-Gupta, Des: Adrian Rees. **Make Space!**, p. 58. See illustration, Appendix C, p.202

[22]In Great Britain it is only the better resourced theatre companies such as the RSC that keep videos of all productions. As these are single camera they provide a limited archival record of productions.

components are identifiable by the spectator and the designer is clear about his intentions:

> We wanted to find a visual link between C.S. Lewis's academic life and the world of Narnia. We found it on a visit to Magdelen College, Oxford, where stone pillars supporting figures from mythology and antiquity ring the edge of the quadrangle. We substituted figures from the **Chronicles of Narnia** and used the pillars to frame our acting area .... The figures looking down were a constant reminder of the magic in his work.[23]

What we have become accustomed to describing as *surrealism* has its roots in the term *anachorism,* the sister figure to *anachronism.* Whereas surrealism has been concerned with the representation and interpretation of dreams, *anachorism* predates Freudian psycho-analysis and is straightforwardly a term for something deliberately placed in the 'wrong ' - i.e. not in a conventional or expected - context. (Tigers in Hyde Park, Aristotle's *Poetics* in a Mickey Mouse lunch-box ...) The very purpose of designing a set is to appeal to the imagination of the spectator, to collude with the beholder in creating an invented illusory world that is not real in any literal sense. Rather than being grounded in the ordinary and everyday, it is bound to be more of the stuff of dreams in its appeal to the spectator's collective unconscious.

In the context of visual art, to describe surrealism as an object deliberately placed in the wrong place is to divest the concept of any of its reverberative, poetic and above all, symbolic qualities, and indeed it is to deny the seminal influence of Freud as an interpreter of dream imagery. Nevertheless, it is precisely that immediate shock value of the unexpected, the inexplicable, the physical dislocation presaging the

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[23]Society of British Theatre Designers **Make Space!** Theatre Design Umbrella/The Society of British Theatre Designers, 1994. p. 58

secondary cerebral process of symbol reading that makes the images of Dali or Magritte so memorable.

In order to identify that an object or living organism is in the 'wrong' place, there has to be recognition of what the 'right' place might be. Aristotle's *Poetics* should be on the library shelf in the Classics' section, not in the lunch box. Similarly, if the location is the lunch box, the 'right' objects would be a yoghurt, a Penguin biscuit and so on. One could argue that unless the dominant location is established as *real* - as recognisable and conventional - the *surreal* has a diminished, certainly different, effect. Ken Russell is notorious, particularly in his opera work, for over-employing symbolism and the surreal, thus blunting its effect. Ralph Koltai's sets for **Les Soldats** is a fairly restrained example.[24]

For **My Mother Said I Never Should,**[25] Fran Thomson's 'surreal' giant anachoric red rose which dwarfs the downstage construction is, she implies, a representation of or indicator to a third layer of time:

> The time structure of the play is a complicated juxtaposition of past and present *and another time, a dreamtime*, where all four characters meet and play as children. It was this dreamtime that Tony and I wanted to explore to create a performance space that would heighten the expressionistic elements of the play.[26]

So loaded and open is the red rose as symbol that there cannot be any over-specific reading (this is not Blake's 'sick rose'), instead the physically dominant red rose image imbues the whole with a general benevolence embracing elements of the natural, the coloured and the perfumed:

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[24]**Les Soldats,** Zimmermann. Opera de Lyon, 1983. Dir: Ken Russell, Des: Ralph Koltai. Goodwin, p. 126. See illustration, Appendix C, p. 204

[25]Charlotte Keatley. **My Mother Said I Never Should**. Birmingham Repertory Theatre, 1992. Dir:Anthony Clarke. Des: Fran Thompson. **Make Space!** p. 50. See illustration, Appendix C, p. 205

[26]**Make Space!** p. 50. See illustration, Appendix C, p. 205

Inevitably *anachorism* spills over into *metaphor.* The difference is that *anachorism* asks the question "What is that doing there?" In the case of Hugh Durrant's design for **An Ideal Husband,**[27] the question is, "What is that giant peacock doing in a nineteenth-century drawing room?" Durrant's commentary exemplifies the primary skill of the designer - to combine the aesthetic and the practical:

> The very large stage at Plymouth was filled by a huge peacock - a metaphor for Lady Chiltern's view of her husband. Its tail defined and restricted the acting area but without dwarfing the actors. It also acted as a sounding board, deflecting the words into the auditorium.[28]

We are bedevilled by the 'bastard' art form of scenography, for it is neither fine art, sculpture, architecture, illustration of written text, nor fashion show, but something of all that. Finding a discipline within the morass is problematic, so an analysis as sure-footed and authoritative as classical rhetoric is initially seductive and ultimately apposite. If theorists as diverse as Barthes, Eagleton and Gombrich can either introduce or close their works with direct reference to classical rhetoric, its study and application is surely a worthwhile journey rather than an *aporia.* Barthes opens his **To write; an Intransitive Verb?**

> For centuries, Western culture conceived of literature not as we do today, through a study of works, authors and schools, but through a genuine theory of language. This theory, whose name, *rhetoric*, came to it from antiquity, reigned in the Western world from Gorgias to the Renaissance - for nearly two thousand years.[29]

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[27]Oscar Wilde. **An Ideal Husband**. Plymouth Theatre Royal, 1993. Dir: Amanda Knott, Des: Hugh Durrant. **Make Space!** p. 58. See illustration Appendix C, p.206

[28]Ibid

[29]Macksey, R. and Donato, E. (eds) **The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man**. John Hopkins University Press, 1972, pp.133-145

In his Conclusion, Eagleton, having buried 'the subject we sought to unearth' - that is, literary theory - as a post mortem postscript, suddenly produces out of the hat:

> Rhetoric [with] its concerns for the kinds of effects which discourses produce, and how they produce them... Rhetoric, which was the received form of critical analysis all the way from ancient society to the eighteenth century, examined the way discourses are constructed in order to achieve certain effects... its horizon was nothing less than the field of discursive practices in society as a whole, and its particular interests lay in grasping such practices as forms of power and performance.[30]

And Gombrich concludes:

> ...the rhetorical tradition may help us to see not only the problem of expression but even that of self-expression from an unexpected angle. Romanticism has taught us to talk of art in terms of inspiration and creativity. It was only interested in what was new and original. The very existence of styles and traditions has made us doubtful of this approach to the history of art. It is here that the tradition of rhetoric is such a useful corrective because it supplies a philosophy of language.[31]

The attraction - and, arguably, the limitation - of rhetoric as codification is its stability within a destabilised world.

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[30]Eaglton, T. **Literary Theory**. Blackwell, 1983, p. 205.
[31]Gombrich, E.H. **Art and Illusion**. *A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*. Phaidon, 1977, p. 322

THE RHETORIC OF BERKOFF'S METAMORPHOSIS.

Physical theatre implies a fusing of images - the relationship of the individual human body to its physical environment and/or the potential for an ensemble of bodies to unite with one another to form a picture of a material object or organism, (e.g. an insect) or a tableau of recognisably human characters. Total Theatre, as defined by Stephen Berkoff, is such a performance style, forming a complete interaction with all theatrical components - 'it should engage the senses on all levels totally, as the senses are engaged in life, but with each discipline supporting the other - total theatre, total life, sound, movement, light, text, music.'[32] Berkoff's theatre adaptations of narrative such as Kafka's **Metamorphosis** develop the idea of non-representational images of human behaviour in an abstracted world. Berkoff's description of the scenography for **Metamorphosis** (which he designed himself) epitomises a welding of production components - performance style, set, costumes, sound and lighting:

> A skeletal framework of steel suggesting an abstract sculpture of a giant insect is stretched across the stage - this serves as a home of the family or carapace. The stage is void of props - everything is mimed - apart from three black stools (metal) situated equi-distant downstage for the family to use. The scaffolding narrows at the back, containing in its centre Gregor's room or cage. He is on a small ramp (2'6") suggesting always that Gregor is hovering above the family. He is always watching - forever aware. The living quarters that the family use are demarcated by a sharply lit area, thus when Greta opens

[32]**Metamorphosis**. adpt. Berkoff. Amber Lane Press 1988. Introduction. p. 72

> Gregor's door a hard light snaps down on the cage indicating the family can now see him. When this light is off the door is shut - that is stage reality for the family - the second reality for the audience is, of course, that he is always seen in the half light but his family cannot see him. Within his cage are horizontal metal bars allowing Gregor to gradually climb up the wall. At the top of the cage the bars fan out to the edge of the scaffolding downstage to enable Gregor at a later point of the play to climb along the ceiling upside down and beetle like.[33]

Berkoff is notoriously prescriptive in the detail of his stage directions, but this description is not a mapping out of moves or 'blocking' - it is rather an illustration of how Berkoff the director/designer (and actor) thinks in pictures; weaving narrative and surreal characterisation into lighting and construction. The steel scaffolding is a 'giant insect', 'carapace', and 'home of the family 'and/or' cage. The LX cue, 'A hard light snaps' simultaneously indicates the type of selective lighting employed and evokes the metallic sound of the scaffold. The creation of 'two realities' by the lighting relates to a similar audience-complicity required for the beetle's strangulated speech. (The audience can understand him but his family do not.)

The Kakfa short story is in a general sense an *allegory*, and more particularly it is a *fabula* (or *apologue* in Greek) in the Aesopian tradition - i.e. there is a moral to the story and it involves animals or, as in this *fabula*, giant insects. *Hyperbaton* or reversal of the expected order applies in that, rather than an animal behaving as a man, as a result of his transformation, Gregor the man is forced to behave physically

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[33]Berkoff, S. **The Theatre of Stephen Berkoff**. Methuen, 1992. p.13 **Metamorphosis** in London, (The Round House), 1969, Düsseldorf, 1983, London, (The Mermaid) 1986, New York (1989). Martha Swope's production photographs taken during the Broadway run and Roger Morton's at The Mermaid (more than those from the Round House and from Düsseldorf) express the manner in which the linear dynamics of the scenography combine with the tension in the bodies and physiognomies of the performers (*energia.)* Photographers of dance are technically in advance of theatre photographers in their ability to illustrate how the energy of the actor activates the stage environment.

as a beetle. Added to the rhetorical genre of the narrative as *apologue* is the bracketing of fable with mythological narrative which would have occurred in the *progymnasmata* or training of both Greek and Roman would-be rhetoricians.[34] Berkoff constantly refers to the mythological content in his work. His plays explore 'themes (that) are non-representational images of human behaviour rather than life-like characters...stimulated by the idea of a theatre drawing on its ancient myths.'[35] He cites **Greek** as 'a recreation of the various Oedipus myths which seemed to apply ...**Greek** came to me via Sophocles, trickling its way down the milennia until it reached the unimaginative wastelands of Tufnell Park...'[36] and **Agamemnon** loosely followed the myth of Atreus, although he 'chose to take [his] own route from time to time.' Thus Berkoff's narrative text for **Metamorphosis** suggests a postmodernism/classicism ripe for rhetorical deconstruction.

If classical myth is the over-arching narrative imperative for Berkoff's scenography in both his Kafka adaptations, **Metamorphosis** and **The Trial**, then Expressionism is the dominant aesthetic antecedent:

> The goal of the Expressionist metteur *en scene* was not to *represent* in the illusionist fashion a coherent situation....The expressionist theatre established two different tendencies in its design which were integrated with one another to present the idea of total theatre. The first was inclined to distort reality and the second offered a rhythmical organization of space. The two tendencies, particularly apparent in the German theatre of the twenties, also existed in other countries of Central Europe [such as] Czechoslovakia.[37]

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[34]Bonner,S.F. **Education in Ancient Rome**. University of California Press, 1977. pp. 250-251. A student would cut his discursive teeth with fable and myth and work up towards the Thesis and the Discussion of a Law.
[35]Berkoff, p. 10
[36]ibid, p.139
[37]Bablet, D. **The Revolutions of Stage Design in the 20th Century.** Leon Amiel, Paris-New York, 1977, p.77

The 'rhythmic organisation of space' is clearly apparent from photographs of the set.[38] The performers have arranged themselves symmetrically within the 'cage'. The spare synchronicity and balance of the scaffolding design has its bar-lines echoed by the parallel lines on the floor (*epanalepsis)* and the space is cut across by the horizontals of the construction and the diagonal shadows created by the up-lighting.[39] This could be described as *parison* or symmetrical structure, but also the more complex chiasmus, derived from the Greek letter X (chi) meaning mirror inversion which, as Lanham points out, 'seems to set up a natural internal dynamic that draws the parts closer together.'[40]

What Bablet describes as 'a tendency for Expressionist scenographers to use 'scenic abbreviations' (such as Pirchan's design for **Othello** with Desdemona's giant bed isolated centrally on stage[41]) can be more accurately divided up into *metaphor, metonymy* or *synecdoche*. Berkoff's cage construction embraces all these categories. An allegory is an extended metaphor. Gregor, trapped in his beetle body is a metaphor for urban man entrapped by family and work, hence the cage complies with the metaphorical, entomological image (both as carapace and as an insect trapped in a box) while simultaneously fulfilling a practical function as house (the actors move from 'room to room' within it). As with the doll's house effect of McNeil's diminutive (but humanly inhabited) house-on-stilts in **An Inspector Calls,** the spectator reads the cage as both metaphor and distorted reality (*hypallage*[42]). The cage is *metonymic* in that cage-as-symbol has a clear reading of involuntary incarceration and it is

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[38]See Appendix C, p. 207 no.35

[39]See Appendix C, p.208 no.29

[40]Lanham, R. **A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms**. Univ. of California Press.1991, p. 33. Lanham's example of the figure is Samuel Johnson saying to an aspiring author 'Your manuscript is both good and original: but the part that is good is not original and the part that is original is not good.'

[41]**Othello** Shakespeare. Dir: Jessner, Des: Pirchan. Staatschauspielhaus 1921. Such indexes of location are similar to Craig's intention to create central symbols.

[42]Vickers, p. 245, quotes Puttenhams's definition of *hypallage*: 'changing the true construction of the (image) whereby the sense is perverted and made very absurd.' Puttenham, George, **The Arte of English Poesie,** 1589. Cambridge; repr. 1970, ed. G.Willcock and A.Walker. (No page number provided.)

synecdochic in its architectural incompleteness - i.e. the scaffolding bars *suggest* cage as only part of a whole imprisoning box.

Like the set, the costumes encompass the shades between black and white and the actors have exaggeratedly whitened faces. There is a clear justification for such a design decision. The costumes loosely convey the period in which the narrative is placed (1920s), the location (Central Europe) and class (bourgeois) of Kafka's story while at the same time reflecting a contemporary (1980s) interpretation of the expressionistic aesthetic (1920s). To analyse *how* exactly is where the application of rhetorical terms is useful. The photograph of Gregor on his father's back[43] exemplifies the interrelationship of performance, costume, lighting and set. The parallel extension of the two actors' arms parallels the lines of the scaffolding bars. The appearance of performers and set is exaggerated (*hyperbole*) by the immense shadow created by up lighting. The shadow provides a dual perspective. It makes a *hyperbolic* statement of 'reality' by illuminating the grotesque gestures; shape and facial expression of people/ actors, but it also creates a giant image of a multi-poditic insect trapped within bars (*auxesis*[44]).

The costumes of the two male performers, as I have noted, have a literal, period denotation, but it is only by a detailed breakdown of the patterning that we can appreciate the visual intertextuality within the whole picture. They both have centre partings in their hair. One actor has a moustache across his lip, on the other the horizontal takes the form of spectacles as *anticipatio* of *the* dominant image which is vertical stripes cut across by an occasional horizontal. (Note the cuffs of the sleeves, the belt, the tops of boots and bottoms of breeches.) This patterning is repeated in a varied form through all the costumes, (*anadiplosis* in a constant *antithesis* of black and white). The parallel stripes are in various combinations - the shirts are black on white, Baryshnikov/Gregor's trousers are white on black, whereas Aubergenois/Mr.

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[43]See Appendix C, p.209 no.4.

[44]'Increase, amplification.Use of a heightened [image] in place of an ordinary one.' Lanham, p.26

Samsa's trousers are black on white with an internal horizontal patterning (*polyptoton*[45]). The dress worn by Potter/Greta[46] shows a similar set of variations and, as in the other photographs, we note that it is the manner in which the costumes are worn with the characters 'in a physical attitude that reflects the core of the action' (Berkoff) that heighten the contrast between their relative normality or 'reality' versus the grotesque physicality and the abstraction of the set design. The whole is 'aesthetically united (not opposed as in *antithesis*) by contrary and incompatible-seeming states' - Vickers' definition of *synoeciosis*.[47]

This analysis needs to end with *epanorthosis* - a 'setting straight'. (Lanham.) It would be blinkered and obsessive to insist that the application of classical rhetoric is the **only** systemisation appropriate for reading scenography, but one of its advantages - apart from making it possible to address and decodify detail - is that rhetoric indicates a clear relationship between intention and reception. An orator whose purpose via his performance was to persuade - to communicate ideas - would have consciously employed all those figures that he had been taught and would anticipate their effect. A **listening spectator** (rather than a reader) would be familiar with the code or methodology and would know how he was supposed to respond. Communication would have been assured.

We have returned to the territory of reception theory here and this appears to be the safest theoretical ground. A canter through literary theory from formalism, through structuralism to the 'post' positions of modernism and feminism in an attempt to garb the 'bastard' art form of theatre design in respectable clothing, is a fruitless exercise.[48] Despite Barthes' proposition for a semiotic interrogation of theatre -

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[45]'Repeating an [image] in a different form.' Vickers. Lanham stresses the idea of [the same image] in different *contexts.* His example is 'virtuosity is some evidence of a virtue.' p. 117.

[46]Appendix C, p. 210 no. 30

[47]Vickers, p. 498

[48]Recently undertaken by the Canadian academic, Mark Fortier in his **Theory/Theatre**. Routledge, London, 1997. There is not one reference to scenography in the book

> the nature of the theatrical sign, whether analogical, symbolic or conventional, the denotation and connotation of the message - all these fundamental problems of semiology are present in the theatre[49]

- it transpires that a portmanteau appropriation of structuralism/semiotics is ill-fitting. Thirteen years later, Keir Elam, alluding to scenography, self-defeatingly admits,

> The present state of our knowledge regarding the internal laws of scenic, costumic, cosmetic and most other systems is too scanty and impressionistic to allow anything resembling formalization. This is undoubtedly one of the more interesting and important tasks awaiting theatrical semiotics.[50]

I would suggest that we are still waiting. Despite his well documented study of the Prague Structuralists,[51] I find no evidence to suggest that Keir Elam has any grounding in the practice of theatre production from which to theorise[52] or that he goes anywhere towards solving the first problem he poses:

> Is it possible to refound in semiotic terms a full-bodied Poetics of the Aristotelian kind, concerned with all the communicational,

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[49]Barthes, Roland. Trans. A. Lavers and C. Smith. **Elements of Semiology**. London, Cape, 1967, p. 262

[50]Elam, Keir. **The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama**. Routlege, 1980, p. 51

[51]Elam, Keir. **Understand Me by My Signs: *On Shakespeare's Semiotics***. Conference paper at Warwick University1984. (Paper held by Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Library.) Compared to C.S. Peirce's tripartite theory of **index, icon and symbol,** Elam's model of the 'three way historical and epistemological relationship' of 'Shakespeare's Semiotics' is opaque. He claims to illustrate 'an important difference between the semiotic enterprise and certain other critical undertakings, notably deconstruction'. The triangular diagram has as its apices;
(a) Renaissance, semiotic (syntactic, semantic, pragmatic)
(b) Shakespeare's texts as semiotic modeling.
(c) Contemporary semiotic (syntactic, semantic, pragmatic)

[52]I am not suggesting that in order to theorise, the theorist has to be a practitioner, but the complex process of theatre-making surely needs to be acknowledged.

representational, logical, fictional, linguistic and structural principles of theatre and drama?[53]

We have come full circle to classical rhetoric. It provides a key to open the door for the two-way traffic of intention and reception,[54] but this is not to deny the existence of other keys and other doors. *(metaphor)*

[53]Elam, 1980, p. 3
[54] See Abstract diagram.

SECTION TWO

Chapter 5

DESIGN AND DESIGNER: JOB DESCRIPTION FUNCTION OF DESIGN.

The first section of the thesis has been an examination of the process of extracting significance from the visual medium of scenography while taking into account the impact of pre-production and contextual influence, and then verbally communicating those meanings. This section – to refer to the diagram in the Abstract – is from the perspective of the designer, rather than from that of the spectator. By interrogating the material made avialable through the interviews with practitioners well-respected and experienced in their field (Appendix A), a picture of the complex and developing rôle of theatre designer and the collaborative process of designing begins to emerge.

Because the definitions are symbiotic, in order to interrogate the rôle and function of theatre *designer*, we need to establish what we mean by theatre *design*. A performance must occur in a space and that space inherently takes on the responsibility of being the design. Once the auditorium becomes a restaurant kitchen[1] or when an audience participates in **The Big Picnic**[2] or moves through what was once the deep end of a municipal swimming pool,[3] the appropriated space can no longer be described as *stage* design. The physical construction and visual organization is *theatre* design rather than *stage* design. Theatre design, in contemporary productions, tends

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[1]Wesker. **The Kitchen**. Royal Court 1995. Dir: Stephen Daldry, Des: Mark Thompson

[2]Harland and Wolff Shipyard Engineering Shed. Sept 1994. Dir: Bill Bryden, Des: William Dudley.

[3]Kafka/Berkoff. **The Trial**. New Hereford Theatre (under the stage)1996. Dir: Ellie Parker, Des: Chris Marfleet.

towards installation sculpture rather than to *stage décor* in the tradition of Messel and Beaton through to Georgiardis. The aesthetic has developed to the extent that recent graduates from theatre design schools invariably include examples of installation work in their portfolio.[4] The type of work referred to is, in a sense, site-specific in that it would be impossible to recreate such an adaptation of space if the production were to tour away from the original site, but it is not site-specific in the narrow sense of, for example, a *son et lumière* at Hampton Court where the site speaks strongly for itself and its authenticity is celebrated in the evocation of Henry VIII and his wives. Nor is it site-specific in the particular historical sense exploited by Brith Gof who, on a chilly, wet October evening of 1996 performed their **Tri Bywyd** in the middle of a wood, (unaltered) near Lampeter, where the depicted events had allegedly actually occurred. The boundaries of what constitutes a theatre event are constantly being stretched but recently it is what we see and where we see it that is taking precedence over more conventional considerations such as written text (although there is already evidence of the inevitable reaction.[5]) The work of conceptual artists such as Gilbert and George or Rose English was notable in redefining the theatre event during the nineteen seventies, paving the way for 'shows' such as Deborah Warner's. In July 1995, she re-animated the dusty rooms and abandoned corridors of the St. Pancras hotel with fleeting glimpses of actors in amongst a narrative suggested by shoes. A month later Tilda Swinton asleep in a glass case was the live centrepiece within

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[4]The 1996 Wimbledon School of Art Course Document, *Technical Arts; critical appraisal*. The course offers (1, iii) 'invaluable opportunities for collaboration within an eclectic, evolving culture which has always been influential upon, receptive to and in creative dialogue with many other disciplines'.

[5]Companies such as Complicité, even DV8, developed out of mime or dance - are using increasingly more spoken text and my statement would certainly be challenged by established playwrights such as Hare, Edgar or Churchill.

Cornelia Parker's display of dead objects[6], and then came Robert Wilson's and Peter Kuhn's installation, **H.G.**, at the London Clink in Southwark. The piece deliberately defies categorisation. A room abandoned after a dinner party in 1895 alive with evocative smells and sounds constitutes the opening. Wilson continues to work as painter, sculptor and installation artist; his former profession as an architect explains how, as director/designer, by combining extraordinary lighting effects with Kuhn's sounds, he could exploit the theatrical potential of existing passages and chambers in this medieval prison. The stage designer has mutated into scenographer. The definition is still evolving and shifting and will no doubt continue to do so. There is likely to be a parallel development - one along the lines of ever more sophisticated technology and the other, equally spectacular, following the extremities of performance artists such as Ron Athey who, in his 1995 shows, punctured his scalp with 14 inch lumbar needles to create a crown of thorns, stapled his scrotum and stuck meat hooks through his limbs.[7] Currently, you might read in theatre reviews reference to *set* designer (particularly when the costumes have been designed by some one else), *theatre* designer or *stage* designer. Although it is rare to see or hear them refer to themselves as scenographers, designers do not necessarily call themselves designers now. They might decide to describe themselves as 'design consultant' or 'advisor to the director.'[8] It is apparent that the status of everyone involved in making theatre is becoming ever more fluid and negotiable as I shall develop in the final chapter.

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[6]See Santini's views E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 176

[7]Judith Palmer, **Independent** critic (26 April 1996) found the experience 'redemptive and moving'.

[8]Programme for Shakespeare's **Macbeth**. **Greenwich** Theatre, 1995. Dir: Mark Rylance, Advisor to the director: Ultz.

Few theatre designers commit themselves to print, but there have been some recent attempts by practitioners to define, in published form, what theatre designers are and do. The definition falls broadly into the theoretical and the practical. Significantly, the **Make Space!** publication is a team effort (published by Theatre Design Umbrella in association with the Society of British Theatre Designers. No editor credit.) The definition given in the introduction, therefore, has the feel of an authoritative joint policy statement:

> The designer's job is to mould and sculpt the performance space in response to a variety of factors and essentially to negotiate the relationship between what takes place 'on stage' and the audience. In purpose-built theatres, this relationship is to some extent predetermined. In adaptable spaces and in spaces specifically chosen by the designer or director, the designer has even more opportunities to create that relationship.

For William Dudley, the theatre designer discourse is defined more subjectively and pragmatically. S/he is

> ... part engineer, part dress-maker, part painter, part logician, sometimes part casting director. You may even, as a designer, be involved in adapting the text.[9]

To break down this statement: - With the tremendous variety of materials available now, a designer certainly has to be an engineer. Wood and canvas are largely a combination of the past. S/he is more likely to be considering the properties of steel mesh, fibreglass, and crushed stone or, as in the Lepage **A Midsummer Night's Dream,** mud.

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[9]Mulryne and Shewring. **Making Space for Theatre**. Mulryne and Shewring, 1995, p.97

Most set designers prefer to create their own costumes, not necessarily because of a feared clash of aesthetic, but to maintain artistic control over the separate and combined effect. There are notable exceptions. Tom Cairns and Antony McDonald have collaborated on several shows, without a strict demarcation between set and costume, and there are designers such as Sue Blane (designer of The **Rocky Horror Show**), Annena Stubbs and Deirdre Clancy[10] who, although they occasionally design the set as well, specialise in costume. There is a role for the dress *designer* even if s/he is not 'part dress-*maker*' - i.e. does not/cannot sew. As with set construction, effective design requires a sound knowledge of how particular materials behave. Bruno Santini's costumes for **Carmen Jones**[11] illustrated exactly that knowledge; the dresses he created for some generously proportioned black women who were required to dance very energetically were a triumph of silk jersey cut on the cross and moulded round corsets.

There are designers who can neither paint nor draw - Antony McDonald professes not to be able to - but generally speaking, those who have come through art school are accomplished fine artists. In the initial discussions with a director, the ability to draw in some fashion is essential, as, long before the model making stage, the communication of ideas tends to be via sketches. As Edwards says; 'Sometimes, as a designer, you need to wipe out language.... to find the emotional centre of the piece. If a designer works on a linguistic level, s/he'll probably start falling into the trap of cliché and crass statement.'[12] Although there are obviously financial and practical considerations, the working practice of a designer is flexible enough to absorb McDonald's delegatory working methods in contrast to Edwards'. Her skills include scene painting, and if there is a backcloth in her design she prefers to paint it herself.

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[10]For further combinations, e.g. Fielding and Björnson, see the CVs of designers in Appendix A

[11]Old Vic Theatre 1993. Dir: Simon Callow

[12]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 68

Are designers 'part logicians'? Performers establish their own conventions and invent their own logic - to mime the knocking action while stamping on the floor is to establish the presence of a door; therefore the logical progression is to mime the opening of that door. Tom Cairns' set for **Uncle Vanya**[13] had virtually no props and consisted of two large moving walls covered in peeling white paper to form the corner of a room for most of the play. By presenting the antithesis of naturalism, Cairns was making a particular statement and then logically developing that invented aesthetic - described by Ratcliffe as 'the new allusive minimalism'.[14] Certainly a designer is a logician in the sense of problem solver.

To address the final part of Dudley's definition: I would suggest that only a designer of his experience and standing would be invited to 'be involved in adapting the text', but there is certainly a move towards more designers having a say in casting. This opens the argument that actors might be chosen for how well they look rather than for how well they act. Gordon Craig famously exhibited such a bias with his concept of 'The Actor and the Über-marionette'[15], and Robert Wilson, as director/designer echoes Craig. In the following extract from an interview, Wilson is asked about the Philip Glass piece he is working on, which will have no actors. The interviewer cannot understand **how** he can 'consider a theatre show without actors? Why is that theatre?'

> It's an architectural arrangement in time and space, and it's the same if you have an actor or you don't have an actor. A light moves or a prop moves and it's timing, it's a construction in time and space. And that's

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[13]Chekhov. **Uncle Vanya**. The Crucible Studio Theatre, Sheffield 1987. Dir/des: Tom Cairns. See Goodwin, J. ed. **British Theatre Design**. Weidenfeld and Nicolson.1989 p.24

[14]Goodwin, illustration, p. 49

[15]**The Mask, 1st Edition.** April 1908. The title of an essay by Gordon Craig. See Olf, J. **The Man/Marionette Debate in Modern Theatre**. *Educational Theatre Journal*, Vol. xxvi, no. 4, pp. 488-494

what I think is the architecture, the construction of anything, whether it's Mozart or Wagner or Shakespeare.[16]

Wilson's theory is endorsed by this impression of the opening tableau of his **Deafman Glance** (1970) - a collaboration with the deaf painter Raymond Andrews:

> The curtain rose on the striking third section of this piece to show a forest spanning the width of the stage. Half-visible figures – silver painted nudes, dwarfs, a man swathed in bandages and walking on crutches, a magician in top hat and tails – wove slowly through the forest.[17]

Another contemporary development out of Craig is the manner in which David Hockney designs for opera. David Pountney tells of his visit to Hockney in his L.A. studio where Hockney was showing him his **Turandot** model:

> He has this extraordinary walk-in model box. It's huge, with lighting and sound system to go with it. He sits there listening to the music, cueing the lighting and so on and occasionally he moves a cardboard figure slightly to left or right. He thinks in a series of tableaux.[18]

An actor is unlikely to be happy with his/her production value reduced to the status of puppet or cardboard cut out - her function solely to animate the architecture. On the other hand, the size, shape and physiognomy of an actor are undoubtedly important elements of the whole picture.

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[16]Delgado, M. and Heritage, P. eds. **In Contact With The Gods**. Manchester University Press,1996, p. 306

[17] Counsell, C.**Signs of Performances.** London. Routledge 1996 p.182

[18]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 159

Peter Hall's prescriptive definition, in print, of today's 'really great stage designer' differs from Dudley's not so much in content, as in tone and emphasis. Hall's perspective is immediately identifiable as the patriarchal director's:

> A director's job is to get the best out of the designer... He is not usually a painter, though he may paint; he is rarely a sculptor, though he may sculpt. He is a magician of the theatre, defining space, delighting in texture, and shedding light, not on his own interpretation of the play, but on the interpretation created by the whole group, led by the director. And his work must be in balance with the whole. He must support, not embellish; if he draws too much attention to himself, he will be told that he has over-designed, over-decorated...[19]

A designer might benefit from picking up ideas from 'the whole group' if s/he hasn't had to follow the still prevalent practice of delivering the model either at the first rehearsal or very soon after. This (still) common practice militates against co-operative input.[20] Some designers prefer to operate independently with no shared agenda - in some cases because they have tried such a methodology and it has failed. Fielding responded to the idea of actor input with this anecdote:

> I'm reminded of an experience Maria (Björnson) had. She was working at the RSC and, unusually for a large organization, was asked by the director not to design anything until she had seen the actors' work and had talked to them about what they wanted. When she finally said to them, 'what costume ideas do you have for this character?' the answers varied between 'Er.... doublet and hose?' to 'I was hoping you were going to tell me that.' An actor's imagination often doesn't function on a level of period or fantasy - although for a contemporary

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[19]**British Theatre Design, The Modern Age**. ed. John Goodwin. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London.1989, p. 14

[20]See Björnson' s dislike of this practice. E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 22

production with everyday clothes, it might well be different. And after all, a designer's job is to cohere the whole image, and that doesn't allow for someone wearing something purple because it's their favourite colour - or even because they think it might suit the character they're portraying.[21]

Clancy concurs with this view in the discussion of costume design for **Troilus and Cressida**:

> I do listen to (actors) but they are often curiously uncertain and actually prefer a sounding board. Sometimes they really don't have any ideas. Time and again actors have actually said 'How lovely to see the drawing. Now I know how to play the part.'

but she adds;

> I do, as far as possible, incorporate their feelings. I realise how agonising it must be to appear in a wig one hates or in a dress that makes one feel fat or whatever. I think it's rather arrogant and self-defeating to impose something on an actor that s/he doesn't feel happy with. On the other hand, I don't think that I have ever put an actor in anything that I disapprove of. What's interesting is that sometimes a third idea emerges that neither of us had come up with directly.[22]

Clancy elaborates the 'third idea' in her description of how the dress that Judi Dench wore in **Absolute Hell**[23] came about and how it revealed 'a bit of both of us'. The manipulation/diplomacy skill required in a designer (one to add to Hall's list) is particularly well illustrated by Clancy's explanation of Victoria Hamilton's costume for Cressida:

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[21]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 89
[22]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 42
[23]by Rodney Ackland, RNT,1995. Dir: Anthony Page, Set designer: John Gunter, Costumes: Deirdre Clancy.

She actually sent me a very sweet note on the first night thanking me for allowing her costume to be created organically. She enjoyed discussing costume although, in the end, she wore what I had intended for her from the beginning! In fact it was the same dress in different colours because that was what worked best for her. She was too little to clutter up.[24]

What could be further added to the job description is that s/he has to be able to keep to a budget and deliver on time.

These are practical considerations - what a designer needs to be able to *do* to perform the job properly. What his/her status and recognition is within the company depends on the structure and resources of that company.

It wasn't until the turn of the century that the visual content of the production was recognised at all. The first credits that started appearing in programmes were for costumes only. For the spectaculars such as **Aladdin** at Drury Lane Theatre in1897, the costumes were credited ('dresses designed by Monsieur Comelli and executed by Monsieur and Madame Alias').[24] The first mention of scenery in a programme at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-on-Avon is in 1919. For **As You Like It,** 'scenery and dresses' were 'created by C.Lovat Fraser', and for **A Midsummer Night's Dream** that same year the programme listed 'costumes selected and supervised by Herbert Norris. Scenery by the producer, William Bridges-Adams'. In the programmes there was usually a list following the costume credit; 'furniture and props obtained from...'[25] There was no accreditation of set designers. It was not an apposite definition anyway. Scenery was banged together by carpenters and painted by scene

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[24]Appendix A, p. 47

[24]Programme held by The Theatre Museum, Covent Garden, London

[25]e.g. Programme for **The Last of the Dandies** at her Majesties Theatre, 1902. 'The costumes for this production have been designed and supervised by Mr. Percy Anderson, funiture and props obtained from....'

painters. Recognition of the individual whose contribution it was to create and homogenise a workable and aesthetically unified performing space is relatively recent, despite the output from the Barker/Wilkinson partnership - particularly Wilkinson's designs for Shakepeare.[26] The accolades piled upon Cecil Beaton and Oliver Messel in the nineteen thirties emphasise their function as providers of exotic painted scenery, until recently described as stage *décor*. As Kennedy points out in his chapter *The Liberation of Europe*,[27] and is apparent throughout Bablet, the most visually interesting and challenging interpretations of English texts, until the nineteen sixties, were not in Britain. Not until then did a more architectural approach emerge. There was a landmark production in 1963 that shifted the epithet *scene* designer to *set* designer. From now on painted flats are gradually to be superseded by moveable sculpture. The designer moves into the territory of conceptual sculptor. John Bury's huge, rusting, steel cage of war that he created for the Hall/Barton **Wars of the Roses** at Stratford broke entirely new ground. Both his views and his practice were a radical rethink of realism:

> It's not naturalism I'm after, but the sense of a thing actually being a thing. For instance, I've got to know what sort of noise it's going to make when you hit it. And I can't start to make a model until I've found the right materials - the texture is the language I'm looking for. I can't start making a model in balsa wood and then say this has got to be made in iron. I don't draw and my painting is rudimentary.....One thing I never did was to pretty things up, not transmute everything into a fairytale unreality of canvas and scene paint. I was searching for a theatre in which anything painted on canvas would seem unreal.[28]

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[26]e.g **The Winter's Tale**, 1912: **Twelfth Night**, 1912: **A Midsummer Night's Dream**, 1914: Savoy Theatre, London.
[27]Kennedy, D.**Looking at Shakespeare**, Cambridge, 1993
[28]Pearson, R. **A Band of Arrogant and United Heroes**, Richard Adelphi Press, 1990, pp. 188-226

The look, the feel and the sound were carried through to heavy swords and torches, huge benches, chain mail and lead belts. Like Bury, who was known as 'the Great Bear' everything was massive. Décor it was not. And eight years later 'hard' design hit opera in Britain. Ralph Koltai used steel mesh to build his set for WNO's **Lulu** directed by Michael Gelliot (1971) and Gelliot followed it with **Billy Budd,** designed by Roger Butlin. This was a second departure from the traditional - this time it was architectural rather than textural innovation. The unit set formed a cross section of a ship. From this point in opera production 'concept' design such had been seen in Eastern Europe for over a decade, dominated both Welsh and English National Opera. It became a rare experience to see the curtains closed between scenes in an ineffective attempt to muffle the crashes and clunkings of shifting scenery.[29] What is emerging in Britain is a visual counter-hegemony as the dominant logocentric values are challenged. The level of input and the aesthetic of the designer is becoming acknowledged and a coterie of designers' names - at least in theatre circles - are becoming known.

FUNCTION OF DESIGN.

Interviewees were generally hesitant about defining what they considered to be *good* design in answer to the question put to them. 'Effective' might have been a more appropriate epithet. Precisely because it is an applied art and craft, it is possible to examine what constitutes *effective* design. It is fruitless (and theoretically taboo) to proffer value judgements as to what is 'good' painting or a 'good' piece of music, but as with domestic architecture, theatre design has to fulfil a function - it has to be workable. The route via *différance,*[30] is an attempt at definition via the opposite or

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[29]See Koltai on curtain-closing. Chapter 3, footnote 19

[30]Derrida, J. trans. Alan Bass, **Positions**. Athlone Press, 1981, pp. 8-9. *'Second,* the movement of *différance* as that which ...differentiates, is the common root of all oppositional concepts that mark our language.'

negative - i.e. to define what is 'bad' design. If, in a newly designed house the insulation was poor and the conservatory faced south instead of north, then, however elegant the drawings and however impressive the facade, if it fails to function as a building which can be comfortably inhabited, then it is not a good design.

If the function of theatre design is to provide a space in which a performance can take place which will be seen by an audience, what about the iconic Empty Space? To empty the space is as much a design statement as is filling it up. Actors can, as they have done and still do, perform on a cart or on a bare stage - to do so is as much a design decision as to mask and confine the space. Visual organization is only one component in the machinery of theatre making, but to spectators more visually than verbally attuned than their predecessors, spectators who come from a world of film, video, television, computer graphics and creative street fashion - it is becoming a more and more important part of the process. Aristotle's well-known dictum, which cast such a long lasting suspicion of the visual,[31] is being turned on its head. 'Spectators' have come as much to look as to listen. Perhaps more.[32]

Ian MacNeil 's poetic metaphor is arresting - particularly as it undermines a rigid preceding statement where he talks of 'good' design being 'correct' design. When he was asked to expand, he replied:

> I see the interpretation of a play as a prism. As a designer, you have all these feelings about a piece and you have to express those through a very narrow medium which is the actual staging of the piece - and then all these meanings are radiated out to an audience. You can control the shape of the prism and you need to get it 'correct' but you

[31]Else, **Aristotle's Poetics**; *The Argument*. Cambridge Mass., 1957, p. 280. The implication of Aristotle's word *skeupoios* is debated.
[32]See E.P. interview with Dudley, Appendix A, p. 57

can't control its effect - what the shifting colours mean to the eye of each beholder.[33]

MacNeil's interpretative strategy and metaphorical terminology relates to how Roland Barthes sees text as a network, frequently using metaphors of 'weaving', 'tissue', 'texture', or 'strands' when talking about the structure of texts.[34] What I understand from MacNeil's statement, as I have illustrated by the appropriation and application of reader-response-theory earlier, is that both designer as creator and spectator as reader should celebrate the dynamism of a multivalent system of signs and symbols.

The visual language may radiate as many layers of meaning as the verbal, but the messages communicated by the two disciplines need not be similar. We are being exposed to ironic soundtrack in film - a violent scene in a Quentin Tarantino film is accompanied by the famous duet from **Lakmé** or McKellen's **Richard III** has as its score Trevor Jones's pastiche of '30s jazz - so is there a responsibility for a designer to reinforce the director's response to a text or should a designer be aiming to open up the text further by 'saying' something else? As Svoboda says 'I do not think it is necessary to underline in the [design] that which the drama already expresses in a clear manner.' This argument is touched on by Edwards ('I don't think I should be telling the story'[35]) and developed by Albery. Albery feels that design should 'tell *a* story but not necessarily *the* story'; i.e. the story being told or suggested by the performers need not necessarily reflect the spectacle. He feels design 'should add another dimension' and should avoid the tendency in contemporary design to extend an inevitable inter-textuality to crass copying. His definition of 'good' stage design is:

Two things really. Firstly, it's totally of itself and couldn't exist other than at this moment in this production. In other words, whatever its

[33]E.P, interview, Appendix A, p. 122
[34]Barthes, R. (ed. and trans. by Stephen Heath). **Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives**. Fontana, London, 1977, p. 57
[35]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 74

historical antecedence or aesthetic debt, which inevitably it has, that debt doesn't parade itself. Secondly, that it's a totally authentic response to that material, however unexpected or challenging that might be to an audience.

He refutes any idea of design as 'visual realisation of the text'

> ...because that implies that in performance it's possible to separate the two things out. It may be tempting to do that because of the individual job descriptions - actor, designer, lighting person and so on, and perhaps a post-production analysis lends itself to separating out the elements, but what you see isn't like a book illustration with the text on one side and Rackham or whoever on the other. In performance, all the expressive elements are interdependent and inseparable - or should be. Visual realisation of the text implies that you are translating the text into another language.

When the interviewer suggested that this may be the case - that there is an element of translation into a different language and that a designer is, after all, making a response to a written text:

> I'd agree with that but the key word is response. What about opera? How do you 'make real' or 'realise' an abstract such as music? It's a definition of bad design to me. Design is not translation. Returning to the fusing of elements - theatre design can't stand on its own. That's why I find exhibitions of model boxes so tedious. A model box on its own is sterile. It's dead. It has no meaning or life until something is happening within it. In that way, you shouldn't elevate theatre design above its function as part of the whole.[36]

[36]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 10

Albery's own work - particularly in his partnership with Macdonald - constantly illustrates an unexpected or challenging response. Their **Turandot**[37] - a hymn to postmodernism - was greeted by boos and bad reviews. Equally 'unexpected', however, was their period setting of Tippett's **A Midsummer Marriage**[38] (i.e. the mid 1950s, when it was written). To root what is considered an abstract/mythic piece in post-war utility fashion was surprising and interesting and exemplifies the 'authentic response to that (particular) material',[39] i.e. although theirs is a relatively long-standing partnership, they have consciously avoided sinking into a self-reflexive design 'rut'.

William Dudley's definition of 'good design' is directly opposed to Albery's, both in tone and content:

> Easy ones first eh! I'll tell you what it isn't. Actors are told at drama school that good stage design is something that you don't notice. If I had ever thought that, I wouldn't have become a designer. I think good design is an elegant illustration or evocation of the author's intention. It captures the essence of the piece and deals in essentials.[40]

In the light of Dudley's statement about execution of authorial intention it is ironic that the worst experience in his professional career was designing **The Ring Cycle** at Bayreuth.[41] He describes it as a 'wall-to-wall nightmare. On a personal level, I've never been the same since'. These designs were an attempt to 'illustrate the author's intentions' in that the brief Peter Hall gave to Dudley was to 'follow Wagner's stage instructions, however difficult' and with the Rhine maidens swimming naked in a tank of water, it developed into what the critics perceived as an absurd literalism.

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[37]**Turandot.** Puccini. Welsh National Opera and Covent Garden, 1995/96
[38]**A Midsummer Marriage**. Tippet. Opera North 1985. Dir: Tim Albery, Designers: Antony Macdonald and Tom Cairns.
[39]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 9
[40]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 56
[41]1983, Dir: Peter Hall.

Despite its spectacular critical failure, **The Ring** has to be seen in the context of a huge output. Dudley has exhibited a wider aesthetic range than most designers. Recently he has tended to eschew opera and has now branched out into television drama.[42] In 1993 he developed a scheme for Bankside Power Station. His design work embraces an impressive diversity of style, from the giant actors on stilts in the Brecht epic **Schweyk in the Second World War**[43] to the domestically cluttered cosmos of **The Mysteries**[44], to the engineering feat of **The Ship** and **The Big Picnic**.[45] Recently he redesigned The Duke of York's auditorium for **Rat in the Skull**.[46] Whether or not his definition is one we agree with, Dudley has the authority to propose it.

To challenge Albery's dismissal of the idea of theatre design being in any way comparable to book illustration, and still pursuing the elusive specification of what constitutes 'good' theatre design, we might return not to Rackham but to two other well known illustrators, Tenniel (illustrator of both **Alice in Wonderland** and **Alice Through the Looking Glass**) and Cruikshank (illustrator of several of Dickens' novels). Of course the purpose of book illustration is not the **same** as theatre design, but I would argue that in the way that the eye absorbs text and illustration almost simultaneously, scenography adds a three dimensional visual/spatial enhancement to the movement, speech, activity happening within it, creating a sum greater than its parts. It draws a reassuring circumference, framing the landscape of the imagination. In his essay **Charles Dickens and George Cruikshank.**[47] J. HiIlis Miller makes similar high claims for illustration. He feels that there might be 'something language cannot do, or can only do imperfectly, so that in the picture we can see more exactly

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[42]**Persuasion**. BBC, 1995; Dir: Roger Michell
[43]RNT 1982. Dir: Richard Eyre
[44]By Tony Harrison. RNT, 1985. Dir: Bill Bryden
[45]**The Ship** 1990 was performed in the same place with the same director. See note 2
[46]Dir: Stephen Daldry. 1996
[47]Hillis Miller, J., ed. Ada Nisbet. **The Fiction of Realism**: *Charles Dickens and George Cruikshank*. Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library 1971. pp. 43-53

what a character or scene really looked like'. He argues that text and illustration stand side by side creating a third 'reality'. This applies to theatre where the fusion of the image with the other elements of the production creates an extra 'reality' or meta-text. This is what Fielding was referring to when he said to me 'although I think design should take text into account, it should transcend it'. Cruikshanks's drawings 'appear to be the radiant source besides which Dickens' words are secondary, from which they appear to have derived...'[48] ('Design led' theatre?) Apparently even as consummate a wordsmith as Henry James found Cruikshank more memorable than Dickens. This is surely the nineteenth century literary equivalent of 'going out of the theatre humming the set' - an aphorism that has been applied to contemporary West End/Broadway musicals.

The necessity for design to make some kind of strong emotional statement is emphasised by Albery, Björnson and Edwards. For Albery, 'the design has no resonance at all unless it has an emotional statement to make'. Björnson's definition acknowledges the need for the open - or in her terms 'elastic' - metaphor while stressing the primary function which, she feels, is to stir the emotions in a manner which defies intellectual analysis:

> The ideal design is something that is extremely strong and positive. It excites the audience when they first see it and gets them into a mantra of what the piece is about. At the same time it has to be elastic enough to allow development within it... Most importantly though, it has to touch you, to affect you. The greatest compliment I have had about my work is not 'How stylish' but 'I don't know how or why, but it really moved me.'[49]

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[48]ibid, p. 46

[49]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 20

Edwards emphasises that you have to 'go along the lines of what *feels* right, and find an emotional centre to the piece. It is *that* which needs to be offered up to an audience.'[50] MacNeil has a similar viewpoint; 'It should be an emotional experience and if you start intellectualising about [the design] you fail', and Daldry adds that the spectator tends to confuse post-production analysis (intellectual) with the 'actual experience of watching the play' (emotional).[51]

To concede that a designer's response to the written text, the type of visual statement produced and the manner in which it is received are all entirely emotional reduces any discourse to a quagmire of subjectivity. But there is a sense in which Edwards the artist is justifying her position by emphasising that design, like music, has its own unique vocabulary and grammar, only intelligible when the design is working/ being worked.

All of the theatre designers and directors interviewed agreed on the ineffectiveness of two tenets - literal representation and period authenticity. There was a unilateral opinion that television and film can fulfil these functions much better than theatre. They accede to Richard Eyre's statement, 'I always think that [the language of theatre] is an inherently poetic medium because everything stands for something, the syntax is all in metaphor'.[52] Even Dudley who has enjoyed 'some wonderfully cluttered sets' (design 'doesn't have to be the well placed chair and a cup'[53]), is not advocating a return to Beerbohn Tree's live rabbits running across the stage of **A Midsummer Night's Dream** in 1900. David Fielding defines 'bad' design in these terms; 'There's a style that falls in between contemporary abstract and cluttered realism which is where a lot of British designers trap themselves - cluttering up the stage with a confusion of fussy detail...I find it difficult to admire the realism school -

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[50]E.P. interview, Appendix A, pp. 68
[51]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 121
[52]Programme notes for **Closer** written and directed by Patrick Marber, designed by Vicki Mortimer RNT. September, 1997
[53]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 56. Worth noting is that one of the particular strengths of the ending of **Closer** is precisely the highly eloquent well placed [bench] and [two Styrofoam] cups.

the box set full of perfect replica period objects'.[54] We can see where this statement comes from. His work in the late eighties - the huge cyclorama and bare planked floor of his **Tempest**[55] or the controversial work he produced with David Alden at ENO - exemplifies simplicity and scale. The celebration of space and emptiness remains a trademark in his recent work, such as **Mother Courage** at the RNT (1995) under his new name, Paul Bond; 'My approach and aim - whether it's Pinter's **Betrayal** in the studio at the Cits[56] or opera on an epic scale - is spareness'. By implication, this is his definition of 'good' design.

Although David Pountney works primarily as an opera director, the definition of the function of design he gives is equally relevant to the purely verbal text as it is to the combination of music and libretto.

> Effective design establishes what our relationship with the work is *now*, and why we have chosen to take this particular work down from the shelves.... Any production which fails to recognise the theatre as a forum for live communal dialogue is dead. Because musical criticism is rooted in notions of "correctness" or "authenticity" - as reviewers of classic texts such as Shakespeare sometimes still are - the terminology of criticism has become confused in relation to design and production.. There is however no such thing as a correct design image, since the whole function of design in the theatre is to represent the image of the material as it appears in that place and time, and to reflect the changing spectrum of taste and fashion.[57]

Pountney is venturing into the problematic territory of New Historicism here. How do we know what things 'actually looked like' when we can view them only through

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[54]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 83
[55]Shakespeare. RSC 1988. Dir: Nic Hytner
[56]Glasgow Citizens Theatre. Studio. 1995 Director/designer: David Fielding.
[57]From the catalogue accompanying **With Silken Lines and Silver Hooks,** an exhibition of set and costume design for the Welsh National Opera. March 1995

contemporary eyes? There can be no seamless overarching aesthetic and narrative unity without an interrogation of the present as well as the past. On a more pragmatic level, Pountney is voicing the preoccupation of a costume designer such as Deirdre Clancy when she is faced with the notion of 'authentic' costume.[58]

Pountney has notably put his theories into practice - of 'showing what our relationship with the work is now' - as his time as Director of Productions at the English National Opera exemplifies. He and Björnson felt that 'it was right for that time and that text' to evoke Nazi Germany as a lens through which to view Wagner.[59] The names of the Norse heroes inscribed on the black marbled walls were reminiscent of the millions of names of Holocaust victims enshrined on the walls of the Jewish cemetery in Prague and the up-lighting of the ride of the Valkyries strongly resembled that of Speer's lighting in the films of the Nuremberg rallies. Completely different in style, but illustrating the same point, the back cloths designed by cartoonist Gerald Scarfe in **Orpheus in the Underworld** were abstracted and surreal, but recognisably referred to a **Spitting Image** contemporary world of Thatcherite Britain.[60] They were literally a background but not a *literal* background.

It is extraordinary that the notion of period authenticity still lingers and that the obvious contradictions (**Macbeth** in kilts? **Julius Caesar** in togas or both in doublet and hose?) have not finally killed it off. Melvyn Bragg on Radio 4 **Start the Week,** 22 April (1996) interviewing Ian McKellen about his film of **Richard III** set in London in the nineteen thirties, was still stating a personal and what he considered to be a public preference for 'authentic' Shakespeare.

There is a rash of Shakespeare films presently, made by actors, directors and designers previously associated with theatre. So many crossovers - Trevor Nunn's **Twelfth Night,** Kenneth Branagh's **Hamlet** and Adrian Noble's **A Midsummer**

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[58]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 44
[59]**The Valkyrie**. Wagner. English National Opera 1983. Lighting. Nick Chelton
[60]**Orpheus in the Underworld**. Offenbach. ENO 1985 .

Night's Dream - indicate that if Shakespeare is framed and packaged in a manner appropriate to the time, the public will buy it. Both Branagh and Nunn defend their 19th Century time frame - Branagh because he feels the nineteenth- century world of **Hello!** magazine reveals that 'behind the façade people are drinking too much, gambling too much, doing dark deeds and spying at each other through hidden doors.... By setting the play in the nineteenth century, you can evoke the world of the Hapsburgs, a world where Europe's boundaries were constantly shifting and its fate was in the hands of a few families.'[61] Nunn's justification is that social hierarchy and class distinction, part of what the play is about, is clearer in the nineteenth century.[62] What is interesting is not only the need to justify why a performance is *not* set in the time in which it was written, but that why it is that a certain past era captures the imagination at a certain time and is considered more accessible to a contemporary audience than any other era. It is solving this problem that makes the design seem 'right'. The great skill of design is precisely in achieving the perfect balance between imagination and information.

A literal representation of 'reality' works against any imaginative, creative dialogue with the audience - an opinion that Bruno Santini brings into focus when he talks about working in the round. Inevitably we continue to be tied into the discourse of theatre as metonymy:

> From a designer's point of view, what interests me about working in the round is that far more demands are put upon the imagination of the audience because you can't get away with representational scenery. The design can't possibly set out to recreate reality - unless that 'reality' is actually an open space - so you are forced to deal with the essence of the piece and ask the question 'What are we trying to say here?' rather than taking clichéd naturalistic shortcuts. It makes for

[61]**The Independent**, 20 April 1996. Victoria McKee
[62]ibid

much more interesting work which can of course be carried over to more conventional staging. I saw Sondheim's **Into the Woods** in New York with the world's most expensive gadgetry recreating the eponymous pinewood down to the last needle, and then I saw Richard Hudson's designs for the London production that were full of wit and irony and allusion. His 'forest' consisted of a row of doors at the back of a semi-circular high wall with a forest scene painted on it, a gigantic cuckoo clock and fabulous antler chairs. What it was saying was so much more interesting and required so much more imaginative collusion from an audience. And, of course, it reinforces the notion that television and film can do realism so much better, so why try to compete in the theatre? I find it difficult to look at - or look **through** representational design these days.[63]

This exposition points up two perspectives. First that naturalistic design was a reaction to what had preceded it - elaborate scene painting. Whatever the label we attach to contemporary set design - concept set, emotional landscape, abstract, neo-realism, poetic naturalism - all are inevitable reactions to a previous aesthetic movement which had become tired and clichéd. As Dudley says; 'stage design is a victim of fashion like everything else, so you can't say that only one aesthetic is the right one'.[64] The photographic accuracy achieved by the productions of Antoine or Stanislavski - palely imitated in the UK - with their unselective, unedited reproduction, implicitly reject the collaboration or complicity with the spectator's intelligence and imagination. Second, theatre design doesn't stand on its own but is part of any general aesthetic of its time that in turn is dictated by what Althusser has famously described as the Ideological State Apparatuses.[65] Naturalism in the theatre

[63]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 171
[64]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 56
[65]Althusser, L. trans. B.Brewster. **Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays**. London New Left Books, 1977

had as its literary counterpoint the importance of detailed narrative and description in the novel. What is happening presently with theatre design is contextualised by postmodernism and all the clashes and contradictions that such a movement throws up. And it draws not only from literature, painting and music, as 'schools' have done in the past, but with the expansion of what constitutes culture - graffiti, film, sculpture, television, advertisements, street fashion, architecture, live bands, recorded music, sport - arguably an endless list - its sources and inspiration are much more diverse.[66]

Two skills within the creative team to have had their artistic profile raised in the last ten years or so in this country are lighting and sound. The status of lighting and sound designers has developed from being a member of a technical team, to an individual who combines the technical knowledge required with a specifically interpretative/creative input. Furthermore, they are credited for it. Lighting designers are now involved in early production meetings and the fact that certain names such as Mark Henderson, Rick Fisher and Paul Pyant weave through recent productions at the larger metropolitan venues suggests that the more positive their creative input, the more they are in demand.

The term **scenography** embraces the way the space is used in its entirety; how it is filled by light and sound, as well as by actors and objects. Britain lags well behind Eastern Europe in its celebration of scenography. Josef Svoboda was reaching back to Appia and Craig in his realization that the potential of theatrical lighting was strong enough, not only to blend the visual elements of the piece, but also to *replace* set design in its ability to evoke an emotion or a specific place. As early as 1946 Svoboda was conducting innovatory lighting experiments in his Prague Theatre

[66]In the catalogue accompanying the Young British Artists at the Royal Academy. (Sept. 1997) for the show titled **Sensations,** we are told that 'the artists involved in the exhibition work in diverse media.....Their interests include painterly abstraction, contemporary and pop culture, identity, politics, the body, feminism, racism, mortality, memory, class and social critique: the variety of their media is tantamount to the variousness of their concerns.' p. 1

laboratory where he was employed as set and costume designer. The description of his design for **The Seagull**[67] exemplifies how he understands lighting design to be entirely integrated into the conceptual interpretation of the text at the model making, or, in Svoboda's case, laboratory, stage. The following description is both a definition of physicalised subtext executed through the medium of stage lighting and an acknowledgement of the effect that concealment and revelation has on an audience:

> It was a revolution in lighting! The entire space was covered in black. One light screen was in the place of a proscenium arch ramp and inclined towards the auditorium. Ten further small light screens, in other words, footlights with specially designed low voltage spotlights with parabolic mirrors were hung into the depth of the stage and hidden behind twigs through which streams of 'sunlight' penetrated. My pheasantry [sic] in Caslav! The stuffy heat had a virtually physiological effect on the audience, and that is precisely what we wanted. It worked - and yet it was a risk.[68]

Thirty-five years later, Nettie Edwards expresses her frustration about how little status and time is allotted to the work of the lighting designer in this country:

> I design for light. There's a big gap in my work that is the lighting. The models on their own don't tell the whole story. I enjoy working with lighting designers who bring their own creativity to the work. It's very stimulating. I'm very excited by integration - by, for example, a swoop of light being an element of the design. These things can be very difficult to impress upon a production team during a model showing and so it can be difficult to carry them along, but I like to think that attitudes are changing. What's frustrating for the lighting designer is

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[67]**The Seagull**. Chekhov. Tyl Theatre, Prague.1960. Dir: Otomar Krejca, Des: Josef Svoboda.

[68]Prague Quadrennial Exhibition Catalogue 1995. Text - Svoboda.

that he seldom has longer than **four hours** to test out his lighting designs. There's no time for experimentation, which is outrageous because it's such a hugely important contribution.[69]

This opinion is strongly reinforced by Michael Hall's accompanying statement to one of Nettie Edwards' design exhibits at the **MAKE SPACE!** exhibition in Manchester:

> Nettie's simple balletic designs demand a similar approach in the lighting. The mirrored floor, which to the audience reflected the painted gauzes, also helped the sculpture of the space by up-lighting the actors. Mirrored side panels, which would have continued the effect around the set, had to be cut due to construction problems. *No time was available for a redesign or re-rigging so the side lighting never fulfilled what was intended.*[70]

A sad statement of missed opportunity and a further illustration of the need for complete integration of lighting with design through all the stages of production. As Ian MacNeil points out, the process is not necessarily an easy or comfortable one:

> It's not enough to just get the right people together for a show - you've got to have a good fight with them as well. When we're all in the room together - Rick Fisher [lighting], Stephen Warbeck [sound] and us, [MacNeil and Daldry] the sparks can fly a bit. You have to be prepared to go along several different journeys - to work through your own clichés and then everyone else's clichés.[71]

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[69]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 69

[70]**The Sound of Music**. Everyman Theatre, Cheltenham April 1994. Dir: Martin Houghton, Des: Nettie Edwards. The model of this radical re-interpretation of the piece was exhibited.

[71]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 115

The sound designer's role within the scenography team has significantly graduated from providing the literal sound cue - the frogs, corncrakes and train noises that Chekhov famously objected to in Stanislavski's production of **The Cherry Orchard** - or covering a scene change with the director's favourite piece of music. The inclusion of sound designers at the very early stages of discussion is recent. The definition of scenography used in the International Bibliography of Scenography. excludes sound:

> Stage design is the art of creating settings for theatrical performance. It takes into consideration such elements as scenery, costuming, lighting, stage machinery and the construction of the stage itself, and also the question of theatrical style, where the sphere of the designer merges with that of the director.[72]

It wasn't until a resolution following a debate at the final meeting of the scenography working group at the I.F.T.R/F.I.R.T. 1996 Conference in Tel-Aviv, that it was agreed that sound should be incorporated into the definition.

Technical developments have recently allowed sound in text-based productions to embrace and employ a battery of interpretative techniques. These can include having a live band on stage throughout, providing a semi-improvised musical commentary accompanying texts as diverse as **A Taste of Honey**[73] where the period setting of the piece was accentuated by the evocation of fifties blues and be-bop jazz, or the Rylance **Macbeth**.[74] In this production, with the pianist on stage throughout, exploring the percussive potential of the piano, there was a careful attention to the nuance of sound. In the programme were the following credits - Music by Claire van

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[72]**Bibliography 1990-1995, Scenography, Theatre Architecture, Theatre Technology**. Amsterdam School of Arts.1995. Supplement 1996. Published to celebrate the eighth Prague Quadrennial international exhibition of stage design, p. 2

[73]**A Taste of Honey**. Shelagh Delaney. Sherman Theatre, Cardiff, 1994. Dir: Phil Clark, Des: John Elvery. Lighting, Keith Hemming. Music, Paula Gardiner.

[74]Shakespeare. **Macbeth**. Greenwich Theatre 1995. Director and eponymous role: Mark Rylance, Adviser to the director: Ultz

Kempen, Sound Design by Matt McKenzie and Specialist Dance Sounds by Jeremy van Kempen/Laughing Buddha Productions.

Other recent technical sound developments include moving sound around an auditorium - a technique applied in **Rat in the Skull**[75], which, by signifying the confusion of the protagonist, elicited from the audience, an empathy with him and a sharing of his subjective point of view. But this linking of set and sound potential need not be technically sophisticated to be effective. The RSC **Richard III**[76] at the Other Place exploited the auditory potential of the set construction in the opening moments. The precise manner in which Richard's stick echoed along the wooden floor - prefiguring his entrance - prepared the audience and placed a particular emphasis on Simon Russell-Beale's characterisation. Despite its literary application, we seem to be very close to Bakhtin's definition of the chronotope here.The chronotope is where and when

> ...the spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterise the artistic chronotope.[77]

His theory applies to a point at which the separate elements meet in performance. And this pertains to the process of production where there is no one element, be it text, performance, direction, set design, costumes, lighting or sound, that is necessarily the dominant one throughout. MacNeil employs the family analogy that will be explored in the next chapter:

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[75]Ron Hutchinson. **Rat in the Skull**. Duke of York Theatre, 1995. Dir: Stephen Daldry, Des: William Dudley, Lighting: Rick Fisher, Sound: Paul Arditti.
[76]Shakespeare. **Richard 111**. RSC. The Other Place. 1992. Dir: Sam Mendes, Des: Tim Hatley, Lighting: Paul Pyant, Sound: Tim Oliver. Richard III played by Simon Russell-Beale
[77]Bakhtin, M., trans. Caryl Emerson and Michale Holquist. **The Dialogic Imagination**. Austin, Univ. of Texas. 1981, p. 84

You have to extend the family and give everyone a voice. And there has be interaction because the production is more than the sum of its parts.[78]

But it is Koltai's short statement under the heading 'The Role of The Stage Designer' that combines all the elements of pragmatic overview/objectitivity and personal creativity/subjectivity.

> He has to create an envelope – provide an atmosphere – that serves the author, the director and focuses on the actor by letting him belong to the environment and the environment to him...For the designer to succeed requires a pronounced critical facility, for he must also remain true to himself as a creative artist...It is entirely a matter of decisions. The quality and appropriateness of the design is dependent on these. Therein lies the difficulty – to recognise the right decision.[79]

[78]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 124

[79] Koltai, R. **Journal of the Royal Society of Arts,** *Theatre Design: the exploration of Space,* vol.135, no.5368, March1987, p.298

CHAPTER 6

THE DIRECTOR-DESIGNER RELATIONSHIP

PARTNERSHIP

COLLABORATION

> Despite a production being a collaborative effort, the designer is a very lonely animal.[1]

Like life, the path of theatre is littered with the detritus of severed relationships and personal unhappiness. Perhaps it is because of this particularly messy history that those relationships that work - those that have survived and have produced stimulating and inspiring work - are all the more remarkable. Throughout the twentieth century we can find example and counter-example of productive director/designer relationships, but only through probing conversations with practitioners have the multifarious reasons *why* the process works or not become apparent. We have only to look at the famously disastrous collaboration of the two theatrical giants, Stanislavski and Craig in their 1912 'Moscow' **Hamlet** to realise that this particular failure cannot simply be reduced either to an exposition of different aesthetic systems - in this case the symbolic and the realist - or to the clash of mighty egos. What we do know, largely because it is by his own admission, is that Stanislavski was unable to realise what he considered to be Craig's vision - i.e. one that was not his own. Stanislavski carefully interprets and analyses Craig's drawings for the 'To be or not to be' scene, adding:

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[1] Koltai, R. **Journal of the Royal Society of Arts,** *Theatre Design: the exploration of Space,* vol.135, no.5368, March1987, p.298

All this was wonderfully pictured in the sketch, but I as the stage director could not bring it to life on the stage. This moment saw the beginning of our tortures.[2]

This key incident in theatre history has been widely reconstructed and deconstructed, but it needs to be stressed that one of the usual *bêtes noires* - lack of time - was not the problem. Despite over three years of discussions, workshops and rehearsals, the production was a spectacular failure. The set actually collapsed. Originally Craig was to have had an opportunity to exercise total control as designer/director but the combination of language and general communication problems alienated the actors to such an extent that Stanislavski was forced to take over. This is the generally received view, but it may be that Craig was simply seventy odd years ahead of his time in a quest for efficient, non-cumbersome stage machinery that would enable him to realise his kinetic vision. Speed and fluidity of scene changes are production qualities taken for granted by today's designers and audience, to the point that scenes are presently directed to dovetail and overlap. But even our most sophisticated stage technology is by no means disaster-free, and, as ever, its success is open to diverse interpretation as the reaction to the 1995 Covent Garden **Ring Cycle** exemplifies.[3]

Less than a decade later, the iconic director/designer relationship between Brecht and Caspar Neher provides a counter-example of equal weight in the archives of twentieth-century European theatre history:

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[2]Stanislavski, C. **My life in Art**, trans. J.J. Robbins. Meridian Books, New York 1956, p. 519

[3]**The Ring Cycle.** Wagner. Royal Opera House 1995. Dir: Richard Jones, Des: Nigel Lowery. **The Daily Telegraph**.16 Oct., 1995. Hugh Muir describes the production as 'a technical failure.....the fiasco, which is being blamed on the failure of a burner, infuriated the audience, many of whom jeered Peter [sic] Jones, the director.' **The Independent**, 16 Oct.,1995. 'Maybe, just maybe, a few closed minds have now been prised open....it challenges, teases and tantalises our perception of the piece...' (reviewer - Edward Seckerson)

> Long conversations reinforced a shared vision of the artist and the world, ...and the friendship developed into one of the most crucial associations of the twentieth century. It was a partnership based on the actively pleasurable (**lustig**) involvement in devising theatre. Neher had as great a commitment to writing and devising theatre as Brecht had to visual imagery, stage furnishings and effects; neither would contemplate a stage aesthetic which was separate from the political rationale for theatre... Close to the very heart of their collaboration lies the fundamental ability for director, writer and designer democratically to consider **all** aspects of theatre without following an etiquette of prescribed 'areas of responsibility' established by a tradition of professional practice.[4]

The Brecht/Neher working relationship, amply illustrated by their creative output, represents the ideal professional relationship craved by many designers today - one which, in practice, appears to be frustratingly elusive. It is surely not coincidence that one of the most significant partnerships in contemporary European theatre - that of Peter Stein and Karl-Ernst Herrmann - shares a geo-cultural context.

European influence on British design in the first half of the twentieth century began with the collaboration of director Harley Granville Barker and designer Norman Wilkinson. Barker had travelled to Berlin to see Reinhardt's visually exciting work and this influenced his expectation of a designer's contribution. Although Barker always generously acknowledged Wilkinson's aesthetic input, there is little documentation of their methodology, and Barker retained a recognisably British scepticism about the importance of the visual that he emphasises in his writing. In

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[4]Thomson, Peter. (ed.) **The Cambridge Companion to Brecht**. Cambridge University Press, 1995. *"Brecht and Stage Design: Bühnenbildener and the Bühnenbauer"*. Christopher Baugh. pp. 235-253. (Baugh is a practising designer as well as an academic.)

1930 he wrote that if a designer is 'competing with the actors, the sole interpreters Shakespeare has licensed, then it is he that is the intruder and he must retire.'[5]

In the latter half of this century, there have been several notable and enduring partnerships in Britain. Up to the nineteen sixties, names chimed together include Tyrone Guthrie and Tanya Moiseiwitsch, Jocelyn Herbert with John Dexter and Peter Hall with John Bury. And there are well known contemporary couples not included in the interviews such as Adrian Noble and Bob Crowley, Michael Bogdanov and Chris Dyer, or Declan Donellan and Nic Ormerod. But no designer works exclusively with one director. William Dudley's prodigious output since 1985 has involved working with Howard Davies on seven shows, Richard Eyre five, Roger Michell four, Bill Bryden three and with Peter Hall, two.[6] All these productions were, in funding terms, at top-of-the-range venues such as the RSC, RNT, the West End and Covent Garden. What is apparent when we examine designers' CVs is that these institutions dip into a pool of self-referencing creative teams. Once a designer such as Ian MacNeil has 'done' the RNT with Stephen Daldry, he moves over to Covent Garden to work with David Alden - a director linked with David Fielding through the nineteen eighties. Between 1977 and 1983, Björnson worked on seventeen productions with Pountney, before progressing to Trevor Nunn and Harold Prince. Albery, between 1981-1997 has worked on eighteen productions with McDonald and five with McDonald/Cairns. Now both Cairns and McDonald are directing and designing threir own productions. There emerges from the narrative of their CVs an interlacing pattern of work with a caucus of directors and designers.[7]

At one stage during the course of their interview, all of the subjects were asked to define what they considered to be an ideal director-designer relationship. Not

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[5]Granville Barker, H. **Prefaces to Shakespeare**. Princeton,1946, p. 407. (Quoted in **Looking at Shakespeare** by Dennis Kennedy, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 78)

[6]Appendix A, pp. 51, 52

[7]See CVs, Appendix A

surprisingly, the marriage analogy was frequently evoked. Stephen Daldry and Ian MacNeil's response may well have been influenced by the fact that they were being interviewed together. Daldry was asked if there was such a thing as an ideal relationship.

> It's very difficult because it's like trying to define an ideal marriage. There isn't necessarily a model and you have to re-invent each time.[8]

The exploration continued with an interrogation of what criteria Daldry employed to choose a designer. He was asked whether, as Fielding suggests, he might choose a particular designer in order to achieve a particular aesthetic.[9] He disagreed:

> No. The aesthetic should be the outcome of discussion. I think there's a danger and a limitation in pigeon-holing designers. You know - 'I'm doing a Racine, I'd better have a Mark Thompson,' or, 'It's Germany in the thirties, that's the MacNeil look.' The way I work is to strike up the relationship first and then, if a suitable project comes along we'll do something together. There are many, many good designers. The only criterion I can apply is whether or not we'll work well together - whether we'll fire one another up productively.[10]

The overlap of personal and professional attraction is a minefield within the arena of the performing arts. How can you work closely with someone if you find that person boring and/or physically repulsive? Linguistics professor Deborah Tannen, in developing Erving Goffman's sociological studies of the intertwining systems of courtship and courtesy, suggests that new rituals that previously grew out of the romantic contexts where 'couples' used to meet now happen in the forum of the workplace. Tannen's research is confined to the office; perhaps because of the

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[8]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p.115
[9]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 85; 'The director is buying a style, in a sense.' (Fielding)
[10]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 115

physical interaction involved in the work and the long hours (to give only two explanations) the concept of 'courtship' is magnified in the arena of the performing arts.

> Because meeting as peers at work is relatively new, fitting the old rituals into the new context can be problematic. When regional, ethnic and age difference are added to the ambiguity inherent in communication, the brew becomes truly daunting.[11]

Once a theatre project is completed - the show is over - those involved can feel a sadness that McLeish compares to post-natal depression or an emptiness not unlike the breaking up of a relationship. The very impermanence of the medium exacerbates such feelings. Except, perhaps, for the often-inadequate video recording, a few production photographs and some costumes relegated to the store, after the run of a production there is literally 'nothing to show for it.' Models are seldom kept by a designer (John Gunter is an exception) so they disappear. Some designers such as Björnson find the casual annihilation liberating. As soon as she left college she worked at the Glasgow Citizens Theatre with Philip Prowse:

> I loved the experience of working really hard on a show that was about to go on and at the same time seeing your last one being smashed up. I found that so liberating.... and that smashing process avoided the preoccupation that some designers have today of developing a recognisable style and being able to show the progression of that style (as a) kind of visual personality cult.[12]

The only means of rekindling the fires is to create new relationships by working on a new production within the theatrical framework of - not *unreality* - but

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[11]Tannen, D. **Talking From Nine to Five**: *How Women's and Men's Conversational Styles Affect Who Gets Heard, Who Gets Credit, And What Gets Done at Work.* Virago, 1995, p. 245

[12]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 23

a *separate* reality. MacNeil's reply to the 'ideal relationship' question; 'That's a hard question because I suppose I've got one and I live with him'[13] - is indicative of where he comes from in terms of gay politics. This recurring agenda led the interviewer to ask him if he would expand on the provocative hetero-phobic statement he made at the **Make Space** Conference in Manchester (1995) - that you had to be gay to be a good designer.[14] But it became apparent that the gay creativity debate is too complex a subject to be included in the remit of this thesis, however fruitful and interesting that debate might be. There are problems in layering domestic/emotional/ sexual relationships over the discourse of professional creative work. One objective of these interviews, while never denying the highly important element of personal attraction and affection in any working relationship, is an attempt to get at the heart of what is in the end a *professional* relationship, even if according to Iona McLeish:

> The ideal relationship? Gosh. It just never happens so I don't really think about it.[15]

Conventional staffing structures in the workplace either justify the status quo - which is invariably a hierarchical structure - or involve a power struggle to rearrange or remove the individuals from within that structure. Co-operatives exist of course, but the general perception is that they are eccentric, impractical and time consuming. Studies on the impact of 'leadership' and relationships within the area of work is 'an enormously complex subject and research has progressed painfully slowly over many years.'[16]Psychological studies of leadership/directorial styles by Likert report an

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[13] E.P, interview, Appendix A, p.115
[14] E.P. interview,Appendix A p. 126
[15] E.P interview, Appendix A, p. 145
[16]Warr, P. (ed) **Psychology at Work**. Chapt. 9, *Leadership and Management* by David Guest. Penguin 1996 (4th edition), pp. 254-274.

association between a participative style and higher satisfaction and performance.[17] The problem here is that this association does not establish cause and effect. It is possible that directors/leaders who have high performing groups can allow themselves to be more participative so that performance influences style rather than vice versa. David Guest from the Department of Organizational Psychology, London University, summarises the state of research on the subject of leadership/directing style:

> It is widely believed that leadership is a key factor in our lives at work and an important direct or indirect influence on our well-being...The research is subject to fads and fashions - the rediscovery of charisma and the role of leadership traits are two good examples - so any progress is crablike. It is also revealing in its need for a variety of levels of analysis and research methods. If this richness seems almost indigestible to some, to others it is a challenge. The amount of research that continues in the field is a testament to the fascination of this challenge and to the importance of the subject for all of us.[18]

Antony McDonald and Maria Björnson, in common with most designers, are exercised by the question of power within the relationship. They both concentrate on the idea of balance and equality of input in their analyses of director-designer relationship. MacDonald:

> It's impossible to ensure that (the director/designer relationship) is balanced because there are so few directors who know how to work with designers. Those that don't know feel the two elements can be separated. Some directors literally say, 'You go away and get on with

[17]Likert, R. **The Human Organization**. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967
[18]Warr (ed). Guest, p. 274

the visuals' and leave you to it. What you hope is that there will be as much input from a director visually as there is from you dramaturgically. Some directors are certainly more visually aware than others.[19]

Bob Crowley takes an opposing view. He welcomes the trust, within an equally balanced relationship, to 'work things out on your own'. In a reply to an audience question asking about his collaboration with Adrian Noble:

I know Adrian very well. We started out together. So we have a kind of visual shorthand. It means I can get on with it a lot of the time.[20]

Balance in the relationship is not easily achieved. MacNeil emphasises the necessity for 'hard interaction' with a director. 'You've got to have a good fight with a director - the sparks can fly a bit'[21], and McDonald feels 'that you've got to find a way of being able to challenge one another - to say it's naff or you've seen it before or whatever.'[22]

There needs to be respect for one another's skills but also an overlap, interchangeability. As Timothy Brien opens his essay; '.... Design properly has no purpose independent of the ideas for a production, *which the director and designer must share.*'[23] ('Share' here has the sense of joint participation rather than equal distribution.) In Björnson's experience the egalitarian status is seldom achieved:

I generally find working with directors difficult. The problematic ones are those who are too academically minded and you have to work

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[19]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p.131
[20]**Platform Papers**. Michael Ratcliffe interviews Bob Crowley. Feb. 1993 Lytleton Theatre. RNT, p. 19
[21]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p.115
[22]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p.131
[23]**Designing a Shakespeare Play**: *Richard 11*. (RSC 1973) Timothy O'Brien. . Deutsche Shakespeare. Gesellschaft West. Quelle and Meyer, Heidelberg 1974, p. 111

> really hard at freeing them visually, but also there are those who think *only* visually and there's no intellectual exchange between you. I like to work things out in detail during discussion but some directors simply want a space and all the work to start in the rehearsal room, whereas others want you to have done everything - almost to have directed it - in advance.[24]

Björnson feels that the evidence of imbalance is 'a situation where the director's input is too strong, when, each time you see a director's work, although there has been a different designer, it looks the same'; for example, the bare-light-bulb-and-suitcases which appeared in several of David Alden productions at ENO in the nineteen eighties. A designer needs a director to have visual awareness, but other qualities need to be stirred into the creative melting pot as McDonald implies.

> Really it's simple. A director has to be good, to know what he's doing. But I don't believe he - or she - can be a good director if s/he doesn't have visual awareness. Max Stafford-Clark, for example, whom I've enjoyed working with, professes to have no visual sense. I simply don't believe it. If you're not interested in what things and people look like, why are you a theatre director?[25]

William Dudley is more specific about the combination of skills required in a good working relationship; 'If a director has had a literary or classical education and a designer has some of that but comes from an art school training, then the skills are complimentary'[26], but he does not perceive the process as a democratic one. He sees his role as subservient. When he was asked if he had ever experienced an ideal relationship with a director, he replied:

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[24]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 18
[25]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p.131
[26]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 54 (part of a fuller description)

> That's such a good question because it's so central to the life of a designer. I feel that I'm only as good as the director I'm working with. The quality of the director, I would say, is more important than the quality of the text. I'd rather work with a good director on a bad text than the other way round. My best experiences have all been as a result of working with particularly good directors and the gulf between good and bad is enormous - as any actor will tell you. [27]

Dudley is once again controversial; this time by his placing of director above text in what he clearly endorses as a hierarchical structure of theatre production. Nevertheless, the 'ideal' picture beginning to emerge is a symbiosis and an inter-dependence contradicting the perception, perpetuated by critics that the designer's work is an element separable from other production values and that a designer has a function that is a cross between works foreman and management. The director is seen to have had the vision and the designer is seen to have implemented it.

There are no methodological rules - what exactly *should* happen and whether director or designer contributes more in terms of ideas per minute. Daldry employs the relay race analogy; 'One runs with (the idea) for a while and then you pass it on and the other runs with it then passes it on again.'[28] David Pountney points out that with each production and with each team, the process varies, but the desired outcome of a director/designer dialogue should be an expression of complementary rather than identical visions:

> The nearest to an ideal relationship is a situation where a designer understands what a director wants but doesn't necessarily give it back. In that sense it's a value added process - you feed something in and you get something slightly different back. In the long relationships I've had

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[27]ibid.

[28]**The Independent on Sunday,** 21 April, 1996. *How We Met.*

with various designers I find the process of who contributes what fluctuates hugely from project to project. There's no rigid pattern. Thinking of all the shows I did with Stefan (Lazaridis) - some of those pieces I came to with a very insistent and developed visual idea about how I wanted to interpret the work. In some cases he provided a completely surprising scenic resolution to my interpretation and in some instances we changed course completely during our discussion. I find I work best in discussion. I need a collaborator in order to crystallise ideas. The fact that the designer-as-collaborator might go away and come back with something quite different from what we had discussed, I find stimulating rather than threatening. For example, when Stephan and I did **Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk,**[29] I knew that I wanted to root the piece in a Stalinist experience. I felt that that was what it was inherently about, although I didn't have any particular idea about how we were going to solve that. Stephan came up with the idea of a prison with gangways and walkways that we hadn't actually discussed previously. From that we found ways of including the Stalin references such as having the red flag somewhere and soldiers bursting through paper doorways. Incorporating the meat factory idea came later because we were very troubled about how to stylise the gang rape scene. As far as I remember I said something about fucking bits of meat - hence the carcasses. The point I'm making is that a good working relationship makes this mosaic or jig-saw process possible. It's quite the opposite of what you would learn at a German school of direction where you are told that you should have your concept and that it's the job of the designer to flesh that out. I feel that in a healthy dialogue, different things come in at different times in response to

[29]**Lady Macbeth of Mtsenk**. Shostakovich. ENO 1987. Dir: David Pountney, Des: Stephanos Lazaridis.

changing impulses and that the approach should be as organic as possible while you mould the interpretative responses into the final statement.[30]

Because such a fluent and rich analysis tosses up the clichéd polarity - the intellectual and articulate director versus the emotional, introverted designer - it is helpful to look at Tim Albery's more 'emotional' definition. Like Hall and Pountney, Albery's background is Oxbridge and his partnership with Antony MacDonald has achieved the recognition for Berlioz that the Poutney/Björnson team had done for Janácek ten years earlier.[31] By presenting a series of visually innovative and exciting productions, both partnerships placed these composers firmly in the music theatre repertoire.

Tim Albery:

> I think I can define what I consider to be the best sort of relationship with a designer. It's a lack of fear - fear of sounding stupid and making a fool of yourself. Ideas should be allowed to flow, however ridiculous they may sound. Early design conversations are often prefaced with 'I know this is really silly but I'm going to say it anyway...' It's only if you allow one another those beginnings that ideas can develop. Of course the danger is one of becoming too cosy so you barely bother to talk to one another because 'we know what we mean don't we?' If you're not careful you're not properly questioning one another, you are

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[30]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 156

[31]Scottish Opera/Welsh National Opera - Janácek series. **Jenufa**, 1975. **The Macrapoulis Case**,1978. **Cunning Little Vixen**, 1980. **House of the Dead**, 1987. (All) Dir: David Pountney, Des: Maria Björnson. See CVs, Appendix A, pp. 15-16 and 152-3. Opera North/Welsh National Opera - Berlioz series. **The Trojans**, 1986, **Beatrice and Benedict**, 1990. Dir: Tim Albery, Des: Antony McDonald and Tom Cairns. **Benvenuto Cellini**,1991. Dir: Tim Albery, Des: Antony Mcdonald. CVs, pp. 2-3 and 128-9

relying on solutions you have come up with before and there is a deadening familiarity with no sense of excitement or progression.[32]

Nettie Edwards echoes the necessity for fearlessness; at the same time putting a further gloss on the process. Creating theatre may be, ideally, a democratic forum at the ideas stage, but at the point of reception, in the eyes of the spectator and/or critic it is still, by definition, the director who 'takes ultimate responsibility' for the production.

> To work well together there has to be both trust and bravery. You can't be afraid, either of you, of what 'people will think' of a production. Given that a director takes ultimate responsibility for a production, it takes bravery for him or her to delegate and admit an equal input from a designer and not to override design decisions if the designer really believes in them. The most rewarding partnership is when it is just that - a partnership and there is open debate. Unfortunately, not a lot of directors work in that way.[33]

Bruno Santini's view points to the difficulty of developing a one-off engagement into a partnership in the first place. Simultaneously, his regret emphasises what an intimate and self referencing circle the world of directors and stage designers tends to be.[34]

> For whatever reason, early in my career, I didn't develop a long working relationship with one particular director like Maria (Björnson) and David Pountney, or Tim Albery and Antony McDonald. I really craved that, but it always eluded me. I never got beyond three productions. I suppose the nearest I came to such a partnership were

[32]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 4
[33]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 61
[34]See CV, Appendix A, pp. 165, 166

the shows I did with Simon (Callow) but that was difficult because he was reinventing himself all the time.[35]

Whatever a director may profess about the equality of input - and I am not suggesting any insincerity - the reality is that a designer is paid often half as much as a director, puts in longer hours, rarely has equal billing and is seldom credited properly either by critics or theatre historians. Do we ever see the landmark production of **A Midsummer Night's Dream**, directed by Peter Brook and designed by Sally Jacobs, described as the Brook/Jacobs' **Dream?** Perhaps this begins to explain why so many designers are turning to directing - among them Cairns, Fielding, McDonald and Santini.[36]

COLLABORATION

Stephen Daldry:

> I want to develop this idea of how the rôles are changing. To give you an example; Bill Forsyth, the brilliant American choreographer, turned down a commission for the Royal Ballet because he said he'd just realized he wasn't really a choreographer any more, in that he was completely reliant on the dancers he worked with. Their creativity input was certainly as great, if not greater than his. Yes, he co-ordinates it and is responsible for it, but it is only the sum of the parts of the talent in the room. Lloyd Newson calls himself an artistic director and not a choreographer because he realises his is a co-ordinating role too. The fact that there are so many good female directors working now has had a bit to do with this shift - I'm talking

[35]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p.172

[36]See CVs, Appendix A, pp. 27-8, 79-80, 128-9 and 165-6

about Deborah Warner, Phillidda Lloyd or Katie Mitchell. They are not prepared to pretend that they have all the answers and they can use that fact that they haven't confidently and creatively.[37]

There is an upheaval in most hierarchical institutions at present. Structures and personnel are changing fast and that can be either upsetting or stimulating. What is happening with the re-thinking of creative roles is mirrored in a new psychological profiling within industrial management. The academic/industrialist R. Meredith Belbin opens his book, **Team Roles at Work**:

> The concept of the team itself, as it relates to work; is of comparatively recent origin. This is for two reasons: first, because teams, where the players play a different part but enjoy broadly equal status, have no precedents in the broad political history of mankind.... and second because the assignment of duties and responsibilities has been governed by traditional rules and conventions so deeply embedded that they still operate as the primary determinants of the roles in the world around us.[38]

One of the most significant aspects of Belbin's research is the necessity to re-name the various rôles that would make up an effective team. For example 'chairman' has mutated into 'co-ordinator', and 'company worker' is now an 'implementer'. Of the nine team rôles in Belbin's model, a theatre designer would combine aspects of at least seven.[39] Not all psychologists are as convinced as Belbin of the efficacy of teamwork. Michael West (Institute of Work Psychology, University of Sheffield) argues that irrespective of rôle nomenclature, it is not a simple linear relationship;

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[37]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p.120

[38]Belbin, R. Meredith. **Team Roles at Work**. Butterworth Heinemann, 1997, p. 1 (First printed 1993. Five reprints since.)

[39]For example, a **plant** is described as 'creative, imaginative, solves difficult problems'; a **shaper** is 'challenging, dynamic'; a **completer** is 'painstaking and conscientious'; a **specialist** 'single minded, dedicated'. (Belbin, p. 22)

'Group performance appears....to be a function of the average ability of members....Overall, our understanding of the relationships between group composition and group performance is still limited and results are often contradictory.'[40]

With the exception of Daldry and MacNeil who 'like the idea of growing old together... we'll be fantastic when we're eighty,'[41] none of the interviewees expressed the desire that their working relationships might be permanent - even Albery and McDonald who have, within the last twelve years, worked on over twenty four shows together. The marriage analogy goes beyond metaphor and the language used, particularly by directors, is a direct pointer as to who is in the position of power within the 'marriage'. Jonathan Miller described his decision to break with the Robertson/ Vercoe partnership, albeit temporarily, as akin to 'committing adultery'.[42] The final question put to Albery was whether he would like to be remembered for his long partnership with a particular designer:

> I think it's less common in Britain - the long couplings. Until my bust-up with Antony - luckily only temporary - I hadn't had a broken marriage before. I would like to feel that I shan't look back at the end of a directing career with the feeling that I've been bed-hopping for something ever younger and sexier, although I do agree one can overdo the analogy and that it shouldn't be invested with moral overtones.[43]

This statement was contextualised by Albery pointing out that the modus vivendi of his 'real-life' marriage bore no resemblance to his professional partnerships. It is interesting, from a sociological point of view, that, of my sample, it was only the

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[40]Warr, P. (ed.) **Psychology at Work**, *Working in Groups*. London, Penguin, 1996, pp. 359-79

[41]Since the interview they have parted.

[42]Romain, M. **A Profile of Jonathan Miller**. Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 88

[43]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 14

two directors who combined marriage and children.[44] There were variations on the conventional domestic arrangement among the designers, but although they were in their late thirties or forties, the majority lived alone. There are practical explanations for this. Generally speaking, designers are not well paid. Even those selected for this study who are established and in demand, dread what they see as a sell-by date and constantly suffer worry about future employment. Ian MacNeil feels there is a

> planned obsolescence. Producers and directors are often guilty of being fashion victims when they 'cast' designers. It is a bit frightening, they become a huge success - possibly too early - get worked to death, do two bad shows and then the calls don't get answered. That's the culture we're living in. And ageism is rife. [45]

Both McLeish and Dudley, two of the three designers in this group to have children, highlight the insecurity. McLeish:

> It's quite worrying really. The important thing for me is to keep working - personally and because I'm supporting children on my own. As I don't go out and network, getting work is a problem for me - especially when people label me as only working with female directors![46] Ideally I would like to do one big show and a few interesting smaller ones that don't pay much. But that's hard to organize. I did have a full time lecturing job at Central but after a while I felt I needed to go back to being a designer full time. It's so odd because I don't think I've ever worked on a show, whatever the budget,

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[44]Since the interview, one of the directors has separated from his wife.
[45]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 125
[46]Iona McLeish has designed six shows directed by Annie Castledine and four with Susan Todd since 1987. Appendix A, CV pp. 143-4

that hasn't involved some big bust-up or crisis at some point - some element of 'sheer hell'.[47]

And Dudley:

> There's a sea of talent out there waiting to engulf me. You're only as good as your last show. When I did that second disastrous **Merry Wives**, the 'phone didn't ring for a year. It was an odd feeling - twenty years working, one bummer and that's it. Recently I've become a father and I'm questioning the life of a designer as an eternal art student. Unless you crack a West End musical there's very little money in it.[48]

The difficulty of combining domestic family existence and theatre life is a notorious one. It may be considered undesirable for a number of reasons - one being that artists arguably need to escape 'real life' in order to stand back and reflect on it for the purposes of their work. For a lot of designers the combination is particularly problematic. Only when, as in MacNeil and Daldry's case, there is a commitment to longevity of both personal and professional partnership can there be some financial and emotional security. I put it to MacNeil that they were DINKS,[49] really:

> Quite. I don't do drugs, I don't climb mountains and I don't have kids. So I do shows. If I did any one of the other things I probably wouldn't be a designer.[50]

A further explanation for the theatre team as surrogate family is the nature of the work process. For the designer, there is a significant part of the production period secluded away from director, actors or workshops which, as a solitary, all-consuming, (in terms of time and mental energy) obsessive occupation - particularly when

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[47]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p.149
[48]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 65
[49]Dual Income No Kids
[50]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p.127

deadlines impose 'all-nighters', - is not conducive to 'real' participatory family life. Is there any difference between the domestic/creative clash in the life of a theatre designer and that of, for example, a writer, painter or any other practising artist or craftsperson? What designers have inferred or told me specifically is that one of their reasons for becoming theatre designers rather than fine artists or sculptors, is because they crave active inclusion within the group-at-play. This induces the love-hate relationship with the collaborative process, for they need to be physically apart to practise their craft and art - i.e. creating the design. To aggravate the contradictions, designers are part of the two different employment chains - employer and employee. They provide jobs for and usually have a say in the quality-control of carpenters, scene painters, prop makers, wardrobe and so on, and yet they, in a sense, 'service' director and performers. They both feed and feed off the family. As MacNeil said at a recent theatre design conference[51], 'We respond. That's why it's a bastard art, not a fine art.' An artist such as David Hockney who occasionally designs for opera, but whose reputation is based on fine art, is able to enjoy the luxury of contrast. He speaks of his excitement when, in 1992, two operas he had designed were being performed simultaneously - **Turandot** in San Francisco and **Die Frau ohne Schatten** in Los Angeles, but that after that 'high', how much he wanted to return to the solitude of painting and how necessary it is for him personally and for his work, to be completely alone for the majority of his time.[52]

Björnson, thanks to her sets and costumes for two Lloyd-Weber musicals that transferred to Broadway, **Aspects of Love** (dir: Trevor Nunn) and **Phantom of the Opera** (dir: Harold Prince), has broken the designer's fee barrier, but there appears to be little joy in what she perceives as a largely solitary profession. By contrast, she envies a director's job

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[51]Theatre Design Conference. The Royal Court/ Wimbledon College of Art. Held at The Royal Court, 3 May 1996. Also see E.P.interview, Appendix A, p.125

[52]**Face to Face.** BBC 2 1993. Jeremy Isaacs interviews David Hockney.

because it's so light and free. In the rehearsal room, he can change an idea just like that and people will laugh about it, but the model has so much emphasis put on it that you can find yourself putting far too much work into it.... I'm only doing one show a year at the moment because the projects tend to be so big. You are constantly under pressure. For **Beauty,**[53] there were over a hundred and fifty costume drawings for six hundred actual costumes. That's a lot of drawing - I don't use assistants for costume (drawing) - and sometimes you wonder if you, personally, as a creative artist, are learning anything or getting anything out of it by working to such a close deadline.[54]

Before we slip into the she-should-be so-lucky reaction, we might look at the timing. This production was on the back of another Covent Garden production[55] - a result of bad planning by the management rather than a designer's greed - so it further exacerbated both nervous exhaustion and jaded feelings about the profession in general.

Even the idealistic, politically motivated co-operatives such as **Red Ladder** or **7: 84** - prominent companies of the nineteen seventies - were subject to petty inter-familiar squabbles and impractical democratic processes such as voting on lighting cues, which, together with such contributory facts as constant and exhausting touring, led eventually to their break-up. Conventionally, the patriarchal/matriarchal director is recognised as an authority figurehead relating to 'his' performers as troublesome but loveable offspring - siblings to be guided and shaped. But this is not necessarily how the director sees himself. Stein sees his function as 'an elder brother', and suggests that the play texts propose their own work structures. He feels that Chekhov, for example,

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[53]**Sleeping Beauty**. Tchaikovsky. Royal Ballet, 1994. Choreographer Antony Dowell, Des: Maria Björnson.
[54]E.P.interview, Appendix A, pp. 21, 24
[55]**Katya Kabanova**. Janácek. Royal Opera House,1996. Dir: Trevor Nunn, Des: Maria Björnson.

encourages an ensemble style whereas Shakespeare with eponymous 'starring' roles does not.[56] The director-directed relationship can be incestuous and problematic. Daldry describes the rehearsal period as an intimate, promiscuous, albeit non-physical love affair that he has with his cast; 'Two months later, if I meet them in the street, I can barely remember their names.' Although designers, without exception, want to be part of this family, it is difficult. They tend to be intensely involved with a director at a pre-rehearsal stage. Then follows the isolation period of model making where creative engineering problems have to be solved. So they peak early and alone. During the rehearsal period, a time when the performance is being created and both director-actor and actor-actor relationships are formed, designers are usually busy liasing with workshops and production managers and finalising costume. Their status within the family structure is not clearly defined and therefore they are not always happy. McLeish, although expressing the condition in the past, indicates the emotional dependency and neediness experienced by theatre designers as opposed to artists who seek isolation:

> I do think that having children - which is unusual for female designers - has changed my perspective actually. Before, once a production was on and my work was over and I wasn't needed any more, however bad the family rows had been, I used to feel what I now recognise as post-natal depression. Now, because my children are more important than anything, when I come home to them, I find it easier to get my work into some kind of perspective.[57]

Those who don't have this perspective, those whose emotional and social life are completely tied up with their work, are acutely aware of and affected by the power structure within the pseudo 'family'.

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[56]Delgado, M.and Heritage, P.(eds.) **In Contact With The Gods**. Manchester University Press.1996, p. 254.
[57]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p.150

There is no uniformity in designers' views on their working relationship with a director. Dudley welcomes the increment of his involvement although, as we have noted, he does not challenge the traditional hierarchy:

> The director is clearly the senior partner. There is a notion of seniority and it's not a marriage of equals - nor would I ever want it like that. A director's responsibility is wider. It's not about fair play - you could say that a designer puts in more hours over a longer period, gets paid significantly less and often is the one who ignites the first spark to light the journey of the show.[58]

Unlike Dudley, Fielding does not rate the talents of most directors highly, nor does he accept traditional pro-active (director)/re-active (designer) roles. He sees the skills usually associated with a director - 'a cross between a diplomat and a psychologist'[59] - as equally necessary for a designer when it comes to negotiating about budget, forcing an idea through in production meetings or cajoling people into painting or sculpting something the way he has envisaged it. He finds it frustrating that so few directors understand what he considers to be the most important element of production - the spatial dynamic:

> It really depends on the balance of power as to whether you are expected to contribute any ideas on staging or not. When directors open up a discussion about a project, they don't talk about it in terms of staging, they talk about the background to the piece and ideologies and vague visual concepts that they hope you will somehow service - scoop up and rationalise - for them. When you produce the model box for them and they say 'great', you assume that they are going to explore the

[58]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 54
[59]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 82

full potential of the defined space. It's only at the final stages that you realise that perhaps they haven't.[60]

To the suggestion that his work with David Alden at ENO - **Simon Boccanegra**[61] for example, did not manifest itself to the spectator as an abuse of power, i.e. Alden's direction *did* aspire to the potential of the space provided, Fielding's response was that Alden is an exception in that he 'does understand about using a large acting arena to its full extent - about choreographing.' Fielding's general disillusionment with directors goes towards explaining why he went to the extreme of changing his name in order to launch his new career as a director. Since 1995, he does little designing only. When he does, the designer's name he uses is Paul Bond while as director/designer he uses the name of David Fielding.[62]

Maria Björnson summarised some of her experiences that have contributed to unhappy and therefore less productive relationships within a company rather than one where she feels worth and talent are mutually appreciated. In the recent past she has experienced an accepted level of arrogance emanating from 'a reserved and guarded Oxbridge lot of directors.' She is in some position of authority to make this statement, having, within the last ten years, designed over twenty productions for this particular stable.

> The system is often such that directors are asked to do pieces that they know nothing about and they think they can bluff their way through. You can't do that with design. The set would fall down... On a scale of badness if you like - the worst are the directors who've made me really miserable by squashing every idea, there are those who contribute

[60]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 83
[61]**Simon Boccanegra,** Verdi. ENO 1986. Dir: David Alden, Des: David Fielding.
[62]See CV, Appendix A, p. 79. See recent opera productions at Garsington.

virtually nothing and then there are some who come with intractable visual ideas which are terrible![63]

Although she hasn't worked with them much as yet, she is optimistic about the new generation of directors - names mentioned were Mathew Warchus, Sam Mendes and Stephen Daldry - whom she finds not only much more visually aware than her generation of directors but more willing to challenge traditional hierarchical working relationships. In her experience, a good company atmosphere is a warm one - one that acknowledges the sensitivities of those creating the production as well as the emotional content of the text:

> (The new director's) approach differs so much too. They are more willing to talk about the emotional response to a piece. What shocks me, having worked for a long time now in the theatre, is how reluctant most directors have been to actually go through the text with you. They just will not do it. It should be a mutual exploration. ... Once you feel you are just carrying out the director's instructions - that's the time to change partners.[64]

Björnson is in the top league both financially and professionally. She is one of Britain's best-paid designers and she has been voted *The Designers' Designer*[65] so initially there appears to be some irony that Björnson shows 'downshifting' tendencies when she describes the type of company set-up she would prefer to work in now. But in practice, the model she describes is notoriously expensive to resource even if the rehearsal time demanded is modest compared to that expected by, say, Brook or Barba.

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[63]E.P. interview, Appendix A, pp. 18, 21
[64]ibid p. 21
[65]The Observer. 1990 **The Expert's Expert** series. Other recognitions include Drama Magazine 1988 **Best Design Award** (for **Follies**). Prazké Quadriennale, 1983 Janacek Competition, silver medal

> The ideal situation would be for the company to have a six month rehearsal period during which time you could get together - actors, director and designer and go through the text in order to share the vision, if you like. Then they would do their work and I could come back with various options and so on. The trouble is now that the bigger the work the greater the financial outlay and so models have to be incredibly detailed to avoid expensive cock-ups.[66]

She goes on to describe how much she had enjoyed working at the Glasgow Citizen's Theatre in the early seventies:

> It was marvellous to go there straight out of college - the whole theatre company was completely tuned in to the visual. Because Philip Prowse was a designer-director, which was unusual then, working there as a designer you really felt that people really wanted to help you. [67]

The egalitarian collaboration she is describing here compares to the experience Tom Cairns enjoyed at the Crucible Theatre, Sheffield in the nineteen eighties. This was a time of working mainly with Stephen Pimlott where together they were in the forefront of bringing to English texts such as **The Winter's Tale** and **Twelfth Night** something of the East European starkness and surrealism[68] more usually associated at this time with opera production. Cairns hints at the freedom, advocated by Belbin, achieved through new job descriptions

> I was attached to the Crucible Theatre, Sheffield as an 'associate artist' - as we called ourselves. We were invited by Clare Venables to open up the possibilities of a repertory theatre. I was involved in all sorts of decision-making and the pecking order effectively dissolved. I had

[66]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 22
[67]ibid, p. 23
[68]Particularly well illustrated by **The Park**. Botho Strauss. Crucible Theatre, 1988. Dir. Stephen Pimlott, Des: Tom Cairns.

such supportive people around me. This was during the period of working with Antony McDonald, so I was collaborating there as well.[69]

The Cairns and MacDonald collaboration on at least seven shows [70] was not the traditional arrangement of one doing the set and the other the costumes - it was completely integrated. Cairns has continued to experiment with different working relationships and now virtually all his work is as director/designer he has 'a particular relationship with Aletta Collins who in opera has always worked very closely with me and latterly has had the credit of co-director.'[71] Cairns seemed well placed to be asked what might be the optimum period for a group to work together, and what, in his opinion, makes collaborative ventures collapse:

> One inevitably thinks of the great German partnerships - Stein and Hermann for example - and they were always held up as the great icons of how work can thrive and develop when the team is constant, but they don't work together exclusively any more, except for the odd show. Interestingly Hermann now directs. There was a period when, apart from working with Stephen Pimlott, I worked exclusively with Tim (Albery) and Antony (McDonald). In the end it's a question of losing creative energy - of running out of steam. It's difficult to define. It worked for so long because we really did have an equal and integrated input. And Tim always allowed plenty of time for discussion and is good at it.[72]

Designers in this study were generally fluent in their analyses of the power structure within the theatre, but there was a certain reticence among those who

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[69]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 29
[70]Appendix A, Cairn's CV, p. 27. McDonald's CV p.128. Albery's CV p. 2
[71]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 29
[72]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 31

exclusively direct. When I put it to Albery and Pountney, the two who (only) direct, that designers frequently object to what they consider to be a rather out-dated patriarchal authoritarianism, not unnaturally, they were defensive in their response. A reiteration of this collective irritation is justified, I fear, when one still hears the opinions of directors such as Steven Berkoff interviewed at the Hay-on-Wye Literature Festival (1996). Here the interviewer[73] indicated some concern about Berkoff's recurring identification with Hitler in his autobiography **Free Association**, to which Berkoff replied, 'I 'm the director of a theatre company, so, like Hitler, I have to rule.'

Albery blames traditional theatre management structure for the imbalance of power:

> ...it *can* be but I don't think it *should* be an employer/employee relationship. I realize that within the employment structure of the theatre, directors get offered jobs and then they choose a designer, but that is not the reality once they are in a room together. I appreciate that ultimately I have the choice of not asking someone again, but if they are in demand, they have a choice as well - to turn the work down. It's not as though I'm the sole supplier of employment. It would make as much sense for a management to ask a designer to do a show and to choose his director. It's merely a tradition.[74]

David Pountney agrees that there is a perceived established hierarchy, but feels that in fact, freelance directors and designers are in similar positions:

> We're all at the end of different wires of communication and the designer is along the line that starts with the director. In that sense, the

[73]Peter Florence, Festival director
[74]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 8

> designer is an employee of the director, but that's where the inequality ends I think. I feel now, as a freelance director,[75] that I too am a victim of waiting for the telephone to ring - with the right message on it. Even if the relationship between you is equally balanced, the rest of the company will behave as if the director is in charge. In the end s/he is responsible for the staging as a whole.[76]

Both statements refer to traditional hierarchy in a profession that is notoriously difficult for young designers to break into. It is one where designers, if they *are* ever interviewed as a result of a public advertisement, rather than the notorious word-of-mouth, who-you-know system, are expected to show portfolios of past work A director need and can only talk. There is no logical or logistical reason why a designer should not initiate a project and choose a team to work with. It is the director's job to organize where the singers stand and to 'get people on and off stage' efficiently, but, in the hierarchy of opera production, the conductor has ultimate control of how even this operates. However interesting or subtle an idea might be for the *mise-en-scène*, it can only happen in practice if the singers can see the conductor's baton.

David Pountney is the only subject to attempt a definition of what the creative function of a designer is as a collaborator within the production team. His belief is that 'the designer is the person who makes the most *creative* contribution to the performance of an opera. That does not make him the most *important*, because if one imagines a hierarchy of importance in opera then clearly the music comes first, the text second, the action and image third.'[77] Is the rank so clear? What criteria can establish who is the most 'important' family member? Pountney develops this idea using the opera model where he considers that musicians, singers and director are

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[75]David Pountney was Director of Productions at ENO from 1983 to 1993 where he directed over twenty productions. He is now free-lance.
[76]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 158
[77]**With Silken Lines and Silver Hooks**, title of the catalogue accompanying an exhibition of and costume design for the Welsh National Opera. March 1995. *"Imaginative Landscapes for Music"* article by David Pountney, p. 23

interpreting text whereas a designer is actually *inventing*. Design, he argues, is related to the text only in that it is inspired by it. 'It is not interpretative - playing the notes, speaking the lines or getting people on and off the stage.'[78]

I find this a confusing and questionable qualitative differentiation. Signs on the staves provide instrumentalists with clear instructions about how physically to reproduce those notes but if their job were entirely mechanical, a machine would be cheaper and more reliable. Actors and singers might speak given lines or sing written notes but surely they *invent* their physical and psychological response to the stimuli provided? Conductors are governed by the score; they have to understand it, interpret it as a whole, then separate it out and reconstitute it collectively during rehearsal in order to guide its re-creation in performance. This process applies to a director in the interpretation and rehearsal of text. All these practitioners both interpret and invent to different degrees.[79] Neither designer nor director is a primary *presenter* because, unlike a conductor who commands the orchestra, neither a director nor a designer is actively contributing during the performance. Nor is s/he a primary *inventor* for both depend on text, first to interpret then to *re*-create - to deconstruct and then reconstruct. The difference in type of creativity is the medium employed and the extent of collaboration. Both conductor and director are entirely dependent on performers - generals have no function without an army - but although a set without performers inhabiting it would be lifeless, it would still physically exist.

The-who-does-what-and-how in the team can be separated out and analysed, but I agree with Belbin who considers it to be a fallacy to qualify who is the most 'important'. It is the interactive process and the end product that is important. The power emphasis shifts continuously through the history and process of theatre production, sometimes requiring a third party, traditionally the producer, to recognise

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[78]ibid

[79]'Stein acknowledges that his position is perhaps in fourth place (behind the music, the conductor and the set designer), which does not reflect the normal hierarchies of theatre.' Delgado and Heritage, p. 7

and analyse the synergy of a partnership. This is exactly Santini's point; '...you can't underestimate the role of producer, or a chief administrator like Peter Jonas who was part of the team at the ENO. His job [was] as creative as anyone else's.'[80] Belbin gives the example of the partnership of Gilbert (the Plant /Shaper) and Sullivan (the Plant/Specialist) as 'an uncomfortable relationship which produced great results' but also one which needed D'Oyly Carte as co-ordinator to handle their disagreements.[81]

Shakespeare didn't have a 'director' as we recognise the term today, but then he didn't have lighting cues to worry about. Admittedly the skills of all those credited in the programme are different, but is one set of skills necessarily superior to any other? What criteria could be used to compare them? If a lighting designer tells us that she is in the position of greatest power on the team because without her expertise an audience would literally not be able to see anyone or anything, how would we react?

. For most practitioners, the creation of theatre works best as a democratic, collaborative process, but the hierarchical structure is still perpetuated by managements pressed into making profit as a result of an insufficient and inefficient funding system. If they are applying the formula that time equals money, democracy can be a lengthy business - particularly in the theatre - so autocracy is cheaper and more efficient. With the growth of funding for new theatre buildings and the demise of funding for any companies to play in them, the future of the development of theatre work and the function of the designer within the team is ... a lottery.

[80]E.P. interview, Appendix A, p. 175
[81]Belbin, p. 72

CONCLUSION

This thesis leaves open as many questions as it addresses and develops. For that I make no apology. The interrogation of contemporary performance, by definition, does not allow a researcher the luxury of retrospective categorisation.

Research-as-journey is more than a metaphor in this work. The first half situates the reader of this text in a position identifiable with the process of going to the theatre. The targeting of marketing imagery might decide a potential spectator whether or not to embark on the journey in the first place. Together with all the other factors such as the building housing the performance, its cultural and geographical framework and so on, external visual stimuli will certainly influence the spectator's reading of the production. The response to the scenographic text might well be primarily emotional and the challenge is how to articulate that response intellectually while acknowledging that a deconstruction of scenography is, to a certain extent, a translation; for visual art has its own vocabulary. As part of the analytical process, the spectator might be concerned as to whether his reading of the scenography coincides or collides with the intention of the artist and whether such variation should be celebrated or denigrated.

Rather than a summary of the scenographic movements during the last decade, it will be more interesting to speculate how design is developing now and into the future.

First of all - the exception to the rule. This thesis follows particular lines of development but there will always be counter examples and the commercial sector provides us with a glaring one.

The Times, on October 1, 1999, devoted half a page in the Arts Section to a particular design for theatre. This, as Nettie Edward points out,[1] is most unusual. It is an interview with Richard Cook. **A Stage Set for Stardom. Frank Stella's Vibrant Set Designs For *The Pyjama Game* Bring the Broadway Classic to Life.** All the points made by Stella and the director, Simon Callow, point theatre design in a direction other than any indicated by this thesis. First – Stella, a sixty three year old painter, is untrained as a scenographer. He exhibits 'dangerous individualism' (Baugh)- for 'Stella remains unashamedly himself throughout this fast moving evening', and he is not part of the collaborative team - 'Frank is not prepared to negotiate about his work'. There is no hint of an over-arching concept – 'Each set is utterly distinct' – or of any sculptural quality, for each of the many locations is represented by its own flown-in painted backcloth. Callow suggests a stylistic development, but if there is change, it is a retrogressive one:

> Simon Callow invited him to do the show. 'Ironic, post modern revivals have had their day,' Callow explains. 'I wanted a painter who could use exuberant primary colours, and when I visited Frank's New York studio knew he was the right choice.'

The visual references Stella refers to are devoid of resonance and defy any multivalent reading – 'I took as my starting point, the illustrations in a sales catalogue.' Any growth of understanding of the medium of theatre sounds unlikely as, in the final paragraph of the interview, we are told that 'he does not intend to do any more stage work, still less branch out into film design'.

Finally, the director-designer relationship and the intentionality debate does not promise to be a fruitful one:

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[1] Appendix A. E.P. interviews, p.72

> The more he worked with Stella, the more fascinated Callow became...He'd say, ' I don't know what I'm doing, I'm only the designer.'

The obvious explanation for such a diversity of development paths, both aesthetically and methodologically, is that **Pyjama Game** is a commercial musical and this is not an area of performing art explored in this work. But it is worth recalling Maria Björnson's views:

> There's a lot of intellectual snobbery about musicals – and envy – because I'm not denying that it's well paid. And it can be tremendously stimulating technically. Often you're working with some of the best lighting designers and sound engineers etc. that can be found. The problem is whether the content warrants all this vast amount of talent and money.[2]

Another branch of theatre that has grown recently is the touring company. With the demise of repertory theatre and the growth of new arts centres, built but not revenue funded with lottery money, Britain now has far more receiving houses than producing houses. This has resulted in a proliferation of touring companies playing one, two or occasionally three nights in each very different venue. Inevitably there will be aesthetic compromises. For example, the design by Arnim Friess for Kaos Theatre UK's 1999 version of **The Importance of Being Earnest** is as camp, imaginative and witty as the performances – but how can it work in all nineteen of the performing spaces it will play over six months? When Kaos were playing at The Courtyard Theatre in Hereford for example, the floor cloth was too small, the visible off-stage areas were out of proportion in that performance space - the whole set simply did not fit. With the demise of the Arts Council and public sector funding for the Arts, there is no obvious solution to this situation.

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[2] Appendix A. E.P interviews, p. 23

In what direction is scenography progressing? The simplistic polarity is between the effects intended and achieved by sophisticated technology versus the use of more traditional materials and 'low tech' production processes. The use of metal structures and laser light, for example, might deliberately denote a functional bleakness, as in Alison Chitty's 1997 design for **Turandot:**

> **Turandot** was set within a permanent metal structure with upper level bridges, which were used by Turandot's women soldiers for overhead surveillance. The space changed with the opening and closing of a huge pair of steel doors...We maintained a feeling of tension throughout by limiting the palette to cool colours; grey-blues, green-greys, charcoal and gun-metal...[3]

But the potential both for Computer Aided Design at the drawing board stage and for a technologically sophisticated reification in the playing space is developing now to embrace a wider emotional and psychological spectrum. Carla Eve Amie investigates such possibilities in her 'rendering of complex digital images' for **The Tempest**:

> By projecting pre-filmed footage of the Court and manipulated digital images of Ariel, we created a collage effect where simultaneous events were viewed only by Prospero as a manifestation of the 'storm of the mind'.[4]

Another recent production that alerts the spectator to the potential for highly technical devices to convey psychological subtlety is in **Smoke, Mirrors and the Art**

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[3] Burnett, K and Hall P.R.(eds.) **time+space.** S.P.B.D.1999, P.91 Opéra Bastille, Paris. Dir: Francesca Zambello, Lighting designer: Domonique Brugière.
[4] Ibid. p. 115. **The Tempest.** Solent People's Theatre, Nov. 1998. Dir: Guilfoyle

of Escapology. Devised by Talking Birds Theatre Company,[5] the title alone suggests a world of illusion. This was accomplished by a treble layering of the set and a mixed media design. Under the stage there was a soundscape and video projection suggesting a futuristic prison/hell. The flat floor of the stage surrounding a literal black hole, comprising a non-set – i.e. no built structures – and three functional pieces of furniture, represented a mental asylum. The upper level was indicated rather than physically realised, by a hanging rope leading to an invisible area. The overall achievement of the scenography in this production is an evocation of emotional space through the minimum of physical structure or objects. The technological – the video projection – appeals as directly to the emotions as the other two provided spaces do - the semi abstract and the implied space.

It is interesting to note that the following is a statement from the projection designer (Arnim Friess) for **The Wall** at MAC in April 1998 rather than from the designer (David Cockayne) What Cockayne states as his intention is far more literal and descriptive ('...the band was at one end and the wall at the other...') than Fries:

> Multimedia? Theatre concerns all senses by definition. Projection for **The Wall** meant images of light, establishing scale and perspective. Live video moved us around an actor, into his mouth, close to his eye, away into an opposite corner. Still projection moved the whole space to the real walls of our lives and the imaginary ones of our minds.[6]

By adding *in* rather than adding *on* other media in theatre production, the creative team develops in the manner suggested in the previous chapter – numerically, in the variety of job descriptions, and in gender distribution. The collaboration in **The Wall** includes two directors, (one female) a set designer, projection designer, lighting designer, choreographer and photographer. Credits for **The Tempest** include a

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[5] Arts Alive Studio, Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, June 1988, Dir: Nick Walker, Des: Janet Vaughan, Lighting des: Bernie Howe: Composer: Derek Nisbet.
[6] Burnett and Hall, p. 115

(female) director, lighting designer and video work and for **Turandot,** a female director – still very unusual in large opera houses – designer, lighting designer and choreographer.

What might be described as low tech., traditional or organic – often taking natural elements as its main reference points – is 'crossing over' as well. In another 1998 production of **The Tempest,** Lis Evans explains how, 'the design was inspired':

> The way Prospero conjures with and manipulates the forces of nature is reminiscent of the work of the artists Andy Goldsworthy and Richard Long. The setting was one of natural shapes and colours. Willow and hazel were woven into arches; wattles and sculptural pieces and painted wood were layered to represent the vivid patterns found in rock forms and waves.[7]

It is significant that Evans refers to Goldsworthy, for he is a sculptor usually described as a 'land artist', [8] who has recently made a foray into scenography. In 1994, Goldsworthy was commissioned to 'provide installations' for the ballet **Végétal.** This dance piece was choreographed by Régine Chopinot and premiered in November 1995 by Ballet Atlantique at Scène Nationale La Rochelle:

> Goldsworthy came to the dance collaboration with strong feelings. 'I didn't want the production to be too pastoral, to have a back- to-nature, New Age feel...I didn't want my contribution to be merely a backdrop or 'prop' standing inert on the stage. I felt the collaboration should be a fuller one...The audience was also to experience the actual making of a sculpture as an essential component of the dance, the making to take place on stage in 'real' and unpredictable time rather than 'theatrical' time. 'Real' time would be made manifest to the audience symbolically, but unambiguously, by a lone

[7] ibid p. 67. The New Vic Theatre, Newcastle under Lyme. Dir: Peter Cheeseman
[8] Goldworthy, A. **Wood.** Viking, 1996. Introduction by Terry Friedman p.7

dancer (Régine Chopinot herself), who from the start of the ballet to its finish, would with measured slowness circumnavigate the perimeter of the stage clockwise, like the minute hand on a watch face...[9]

Less poetically, but in similar territory, in her design for **The Visitor** which involved the complete transformation of a huge civic pride-filled Shire Hall, Nettie Edwards was assisted by a team of greenwood workers. They live and work in neglected hazel coppices in Herefordshire, bringing them back into cycle and using the recently cut (i.e. not dry) wood to make wattles, hurdles, pole lathed constructions, bentwood furniture and so on.[10]

Neither examples of the use of natural materials is mere representationalism. Goldworthy's collaboration piece involves the dancers – and audience- with the process of building and dismantling sculptures. Edwards exploits the advantages of the genuine Community Play by having, rather than actors, 'real' skilled manual workers making practical objects as part of the performance. To a large extent, they are playing themselves. Simultaneously, their artefacts and the mess of shavings and tools cut through the formality of the space.

Goldsworthy's collaboration work introduces a new development in scenography – the active and influencing involvement of the audience. In the brochure for the **British Festival of Visual Theatre** (Oct. 1999), the Young Vic invites us, the audience

> further into the jaws of the creative process. Behind the doors of the rehearsal room you can discover and influence the developing work of Stacy Makishi,

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[9] ibid p.8

[10] April 1998. Large-scale community play involving ninety performers. Directors and co-writers, Richard Hayhow and Ellie Parker. Lighting designer; Michael Hall.

desperate optimists and Reckless Sleepers. With tickets at just £1, it's a risk-free insight that allows you to drop by at any time to play an active or passive role...

[or]

for a finished theatre installation venture north to the Toynbee Theatre and discover Julia Bardsley and Antonia Cunningham's photographic environment that will challenge your notion of theatre. (Brochure)

There are several implications here. The performer and designer's job description has merged and mutated into 'this Hawaiian performance artist/poet ...involved in the making process...in a room cluttered with bread, oven mitts, junk, crabs and you!' (Brochure) The audience is involved to the point of shaping the direction of the piece, but it is still allowed 'to play...a passive role' and if it proves all too challenging, with tickets at only £1, a punter/participator is unlikely to demand her money back.

The concept of the public paying to participate in 'work in progress' is a departure from the formality of the majority of public theatre experience and implies an organic growth of text, performance and scenography - a process favoured by several designers.[11]

The situation of the spectator is in the process of being challenged - both physically and theoretically. The boundaries between spectator and performer are literally being moved. We can find a parallel development in the realm of video and film installation, particularly the 'wrap around' film work of Sam Taylor Woods at the 1998 Turner Exhibition. Here the audience was included in an environment created by three different perspectives of a restaurant, simultaneously projected. As it

[11] See Appendix A. E.P. interviews.

became clear that there was an intimate narrative unravelling - a couple breaking up - there was the added dimension of spectator-as-voyeur. The Wilson Sisters at the Serpentine Gallery (Sept./Oct.1999) invite a similarly active response from the spectator as s/he walks into and around their projected evocations of place and events. Both Taylor Woods and the Wilson Sisters provide a 'photographic environment that will challenge your notion of theatre'.

To accompany the emerging challenge to the traditional performance/audience proxemic, thereby creating deliberately ambiguous space, is an intentional, arguably rather crude, ambiguity of design concept. Moving on from a completely open reception of the theatrical image as developed in chapter two, the designer offers up two, often clashing, ideas simultaneously. A specific combination is apparent in the outline of intention by Robert Cheesmond, for his production of **Reckless Saints** at the Drama Department of Hull University:

> Two fictional spaces, a ruined asylum and a modern apartment, merge in the actuality of the theatre space, (re)constructed so as to place each audience member, unprotected by the security of conventional naturalistic form, squarely in the centre of dramatic action.[12]

There is an argument here to suggest that by creating two specific environments simultaneously – although they are not 'conventionally naturalistic', they are still literal and representational - a designer discourages a spectator from extending his imagination any further. Such a provision, with its two permanent locations may be dual but it is 'closed'.

By contrast, Stefanos Lazaridis's set for **Julietta** which

[12] Burnett and Hall, p. 85

'...plays with ambiguity, suggesting a beach, a hotel, a hospital: locations of ephemeral meetings and poignant departures'[13] – by its mutability, remains 'open'. This is a single set that contains elements of at least three locations simultaneously.

When the scenography fits into John Napier's definition of 'pure design', ('which is something that [Ralph Koltai] and I are in complete agreement about'):

> 'Pure design' is about the manipulation of abstract objects in a space in order to give that space an atmosphere or mood that enhances the nature of what's happening in that space.[14]

Such 'manipulation of [the] abstract' frees rather than confines the imaginative response of the spectator.

Some of the most exciting design work at the moment is happening in spaces not originally intended for performance. Site specific work will surely grow for, outweighing problems with sightlines or acoustics, there is a given extra. The history, architecture and location of the site provide a rich scenographic seam to be mined even before anything is designed or performed, in, on or around it.

A conclusion to research work on contemporary theatre should end rather like the BFVT 'S work-in-progress. The fascination of scenography is that it is in a constant state of evolution.

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[13] Burnett and Hall, p.94. Opera North and Opera Zuid, Holland, Grand Theatre – Leeds and touring Oct. 1997. Dir: David Pountney, Des; Marie-Jeanne Lecca, Lighting Des: David Cunningham, Conductor: Stuart Bedford.
[14] Backemeyer, p. 13

APPENDIX A

Transcripts made from (approx.) two-hour interviews with fifteen practitioners. The transcripts were sent to the interviewees for comment and editing. These are the edited versions. Each interview is preceded by a CV (since circa 1980) which creates its own narrative and illustrates the cross-fertilisation and interrelated patterns of working relationships within the field.

TIM ALBERY

WORK	COMPANY/VENUE	DESIGNER
1981		
Ella	ICA, London	Hildegard Bechtler
1982		
Venice Preserved	Almeida Theatre, London	Antony McDonald
1983		
Secret Gardens	ICA and Mickery, Amsterdam	McDonald
New Tactics	Second Stride. The Place/GB tour	McDonald
Under Western Eyes	Second Stride. Ro Theatre, Amsterdam	McDonald
The Turn of the Screw	Batignano, Italy	McDonald
1984		
Hedda Gabler	Almeida Theatre	Tom Cairns/ McDonald
Princess of Cleves	ICA	McDonald
Mozart at Palm Springs	The Place, London	Jock Scott
1985		
The Midsummer Marriage	Opera North, Leeds and tour	McDonald
1986		
The Trojans	Opera North/WNO/Nice	Cairns/ McDonald
1987		
A Streetcar Named Desire	Crucible, Sheffield	McDonald
The Rape of Lucretia	Goteborg, Sweden	Patti Powell
1988		
Mary Stuart	Greenwich Theatre, London	McDonald
Billy Budd	ENO, London	Cairns/ McDonald
The Midsummer Marriage	Scottish Opera	Cairns/ McDonald
1989		
As You Like It	The Old Vic, London	McDonald
La Finta Giardiniera	Opera North	Cairns

1990		
Berenice	RNT, London	McDonald
Beatrice and Benedict	ENO	Cairns/ McDonald
La Wally	Bregenz Festival	Bechtler
1991		
Benvenuto Cellini	Netherlands Opera	Cairns/ McDonald
Peter Grimes	ENO/Bavarian State Opera	Nikki Collebrand/ Bechtler
Don Giovanni	Opera North	Ashley Martin
1992		
The Marriage of Figaro	Australian Opera, Sydney	McDonald
1993		
Wallenstein	RSC, Stratford	McDonald
Don Carlos	Opera North	Collebrand/Bechtler
Lohengrin	ENO	Collebrand/Bechtler
1994		
Cherubin	ROH, London	McDonald
Fidelio	Scottish Opera (Edinburgh Festival)	Stewart Laing
1995		
Simon Boccanegra	Bavarian State Opera	McDonald
Nabucco	WNO	McDonald
Luisa Miller	Opera North	Laing
1996		
Macbeth	RSC	Laing
Ariadne Auf Naxos	Bavarian State Opera	McDonald
A Midsummer Night's Dream	Metropolitan Opera, New York	McDonald
1997		
Attempts on her Life	Royal Court Theatre (Upstairs)	Gideon Davey
Cosi Fan Tutte	Opera North	Matthew Howland/ Robin Rawstone
From the House of the Dead (première 20/9/97)	ENO	Laing

INTERVIEW WITH TIM ALBERY - 12 MAY 1995

Do you think designers are given enough credit for their input?

No I don't. Far too often we are given to believe that the great directors we all hear about have conceptualised significant events and the designer has faithfully transcribed everything that has come out of the great man's mouth. This really isn't the case. If you look at someone like Stein's working method - you may see some sketches dashed off by him at the beginning, but it's nothing like what the designer eventually produces.

Can you describe the ideal working relationship with a designer?

I think so. A lack of fear. Fear of sounding stupid and making a fool of yourself. Ideas should be allowed to flow, however ridiculous they may sound. Early design conversations are often prefaced with 'I know this is really naff but I'm going to say it anyway...' It's only if you allow one another those beginnings that ideas can develop. Of course the danger is one of becoming too cosy so you barely bother to talk to one another because 'we know what we mean don't we?' If you're not careful you're not properly questioning one another, you are relying on solutions you have come up with before and there is a deadening familiarity with no sense of excitement or progression.

Apart from Antony (McDonald) is there anyone else with whom you have had a long working relationship?

I've worked with Antony and Tom (Cairns), on several shows. Tom originally assisted Antony and then became his partner. Tom and I did a show on our own as well. Three is a difficult dynamic. There is always one person at any given moment feeling excluded or worrying that they are not being taken seriously. And there's the logistical problem of getting three people together in one place for each meeting - particularly if they are involved in other projects at the same time. But the process and the results were often hugely stimulating. The third person - and who this was varied - often put productive pressure on the other two by remaining outside and questioning them. It was harder than working with one person, but possibly more fruitful.

You've done quite a lot of collaborative work in the past, how do you feel about it now?

It was good fun and the events were very much one-offs, not like anything else and purely a result of the grouping of those particular people. The disadvantages are that it is painfully hard work. It can be fraught with personality conflicts - inevitably - as there are a lot of egos at play. This is probably why boundary-defying collaborations always have a short life. However, over the years, permutations of that group have found themselves working together. I've done shows with Ian (Spink) or Antony has or Ian's done some choreographing in an opera that I have directed, Orlando (Gough) has written music for plays that I've done. They were all fertile relationships. We just couldn't have spent the rest of our lives in a room together. Also, of course, there's no money in it - not in this country anyway.

How do you respond to the idea that a designer has had to choreograph a piece in his head in order to properly develop the dynamics of the space he has created, whereas a director, apart from a bit of background reading, is beginning his work on the first day of rehearsal?

I don't really accept that. If the collaborative process has operated in the way it should, they have together explored the possibilities of the created space. They might have abandoned certain ideas and gone with others that better served the needs of the piece. They have gone beyond addressing what the piece is about conceptually to picking through the practical and emotional demands of each scene.

Don't you feel that by having the set and often the costumes decided before you start rehearsing, that you have closed off a lot of options?

Yes, but it all depends on the type of piece. If you've got eighty chorus to deal with and a short rehearsal period, most of the scenic decisions have to have been taken earlier. Occasionally it's feasible to have a freer approach - for example when Antony and I did **Wallenstein** for the RSC at the Pit a couple of years ago we were able to make a visual journey in a simple way and it did evolve during rehearsals. So it is possible even within a large organization that has to churn out the repertoire. But I actually enjoy the initial process of talking about the design because I find that space can tell you as much about emotion as words. That, for me, is the task of theatre - to have as much impact on the emotions as it does on the intellect. In that way, I think design has a similar function to

that of body movement in physical theatre. It's suggesting that there are worlds co-existent with but going beyond the spoken text.

How much visual preparation do you do before you start talking to a designer about a project?

Today, for example, I had a meeting with Antony about **A Midsummer Night's Dream** and I took a book of paintings I'd found which were actually referring to **Nabucco** which we are also doing - because it was relevant to a particular scene we'd got stuck on. I left the book with him. At the end of the **Dream** meeting we agreed that we would think about the images or emotions evoked by particular moments in the music. Because it's about dreams, the images need to be non-literal. At the end of the day, Antony goes away and designs it, but I like to think my input is significant and similarly, I would hope that he might attend some of the rehearsals and have his input there.

Why is it then that so many designers are uneasy about the director/designer hierarchy?

I think it can be an employer/employee relationship but I don't think it should be. I realise that within the employment structure of the theatre, directors get offered jobs and then they choose a designer. But that is not the reality once they are in a room together. I appreciate that ultimately I have the choice of not asking someone again, but if they are in demand, they have a choice as well - to turn the work down. It's not as though I'm the

sole supplier of employment. It would make as much sense for a management to ask a designer to do a show and to choose his director. It's merely a tradition.

It's interesting how many designers you've worked with have gone on to become directors.

I did **Fidelio** last year with Stewart Laing recently, and he's on to his fourth production as a director now. Antony directs and Tom Cairns only works as a director/designer now - don't know whether it's something to do with me or whether it's coincidence. It certainly seems to be fashionable.

Do you think that directors who work in opera are more risk-taking, visually?

Opera, historically, has been more international than theatre. Music is an international language. The fact that in the eighties the WNO were doing several productions with East German directors is difficult to imagine in the theatre. British theatre, up until recently, has been very parochial and inward-looking. It certainly hasn't been as experimental as work on the Continent. People like Craig would have worked in England probably if there had been a structure within which he could operate.

To answer your question directly. Perhaps the medium of the music makes it possible to be non-literal.

Although the majority of it was non-naturalistic, when you did Billy Budd with Antony, there was a flash of nineteenth-century realism which was very effective by contrast to the rest of the piece.

The men lead these drab, oppressed lives and actually going into battle was an exciting escape - so the sudden colour and thrill of cannons and guns signposted this escapism. Because the soldiers were looking back romantically and nostalgically to a past era of glory, we reproduced a bit of romantic opera.

What is your definition of good stage design?

Two things really. Firstly, it's totally itself but it couldn't exist other than in this production. In other words, whatever its historical antecedents or aesthetic debt, which inevitably it has, that debt doesn't parade itself. Secondly, that's it's a totally authentic response to the material, however unexpected or challenging that might be to an audience.

Can you describe it as visual realisation of the text?

No, because that implies that in performance it's possible to separate the two things out. It may be tempting to do that because of the individual job descriptions - actor, designer, lighting person and so on, and perhaps a post-production analysis lends itself to separating out the elements, but what you see isn't like a book illustration with the text on

one side and Rackham or Boz on the other. In performance, all the expressive elements are interdependent and inseparable - or should be. Visual realisation of the text implies that you are translating the text into another language.

Aren't you?

No. You're being too literal. It's like saying that if a character on stage says 'come in' you have to have a door. When you see Pina Bausch at her best, with the total integration of movement, speech, music, the space the performers are using - it would be difficult to identify exactly which bit it is that is making you cry.

But surely, at the initial stage, if we're talking about a play, a designer is making a response to a written text?

I'd agree with that but the key word is response. What about opera? How do you 'make real' or 'realise' an abstract such as music? It's a definition of bad design to me. Design is not translation.

Returning to the fusing of elements. Theatre design can't stand on its own. That's why I find exhibitions of model boxes so tedious: a model box on its own is sterile. It's dead. It has no meaning or life until something is happening within it. In that way, you shouldn't elevate theatre design above its function as part of the whole.

Do you think stage design should, in any sense, tell the story?

It may tell *a* story but not necessarily *the* story. Clearly it should add another dimension to the purely narrative. To me it has no resonance at all unless it has an emotional statement to make. I'm not suggesting that there need be one governing visual conception. That can be as limiting as over-literal work - the seizing of one idea to get you through the whole evening. There was a fashion for it, particularly in Germany where I worked for a time and I was very influenced by it in the early eighties. So I've tried it but I don't think it's the answer - particularly now.

Do you prefer working on the large operatic scale or do you hanker after the smaller scale that you used to do?

Having spent the first fifteen years working on a small scale - trying to do classics with a cast of four and no money - it's very liberating to work in an area that's better funded with budgets that enable you to create something impressive. With theatre work, I tend to find a non-mainstream piece I want to explore and so have to persuade managements that this is a good idea, but with opera, you are offered what has been planned into the repertoire. I like the variety.

Does it worry you that critics or indeed members of the audience don't understand what it is you're trying to communicate visually?

If you are not trying too hard to engage the audience on an intellectual, conceptual level - the 'I see, they're telling us it's all like a concentration camp' school - and if you are trying to deal on a level of ambiguity, then you're offering up ideas which resonate rather than provide specific answers. So in that way the question of 'getting it' doesn't arise. I have found that the less academic the audience, the closer the response is to the visceral, non-intellectual one I had myself. Critics over-rationalise. They have to, to get something down that makes sense! But I would suggest that going to the theatre or opera virtually every night of the week makes it hard to respond in an uncluttered, open fashion. There certainly isn't much evidence to suggest that critics are very knowledgeable about fine art - otherwise why would some of them have been so outraged by Antony's **Pelléas and Mélisande**? You might hope that they would have seen it as part of an aesthetic continuum, but they clearly don't. Instead there is the usual tedious insistence about what the last version that they saw was like.

How do you respond to the pejorative description 'designer's theatre'?

There's been a lot of tosh talked about that. I think the revolution in design over the last twenty years has been a really liberating breath of fresh air. Some of it has been misguided, some grotesquely ugly, some over-conceptualised, but it's interesting that the actors who have publicly objected to the dominance of design 'statements' radically change their tune once they become directors. They realize that it's not always a good thing to let the play 'speak for itself' with a couple of chairs on a wooden floor.

Are there any particular productions in this country that, particularly in terms of design, (not to over-categorise!) have been highly significant?

I remember thinking as I watched the Alden/Fielding **Mazeppa** in 1984 at the Coliseum that this was a ground-breaking production. I felt really alive and the audience were so stirred by it - to the point of booing and cheering through the show.

How aware are you of changing fashion and the need to keep one step ahead?

That preoccupation can be very crippling - to be part of the video-promo, shopping culture - green last year, must be beige this year or whatever. You have to hold in balance the exploration of ideas that continue to interest you with an awareness of the need to progress. It might be something to do with age, but it seems that directors in their maturity often start distilling their previous work into something sparser, sparer and more classical. Stein, for example, has done that - not always to the advantage of the work, some might say.

And Peter Brook I suppose.

Would you like to be remembered for your long partnerships with particular designers?

I think it's less common in Britain, the long couplings. Until my bust-up with Antony - luckily only temporary - I hadn't had a broken marriage before. I would like to feel that I shan't look back at the end of a directing career with the feeling that I've been bed-hopping for something ever younger and sexier. One can overdo the analogy and it shouldn't be invested with moral overtones. It's interesting to witness problems with different levels of experience and generations in that the balance of power may not be equal - an older designer may be irritated by the muddle created by an inexperienced director and vice versa. It's easy to be patronizingly insistent that the craft is painfully and slowly learnt. What's difficult is that one seems to go from being kid on the block to old fart with scarcely time to take in the journey along the way!

MARIA BJŐRNSON

WORK	COMPANY/VENUE	DIRECTOR
1977		
The Bartered Bride	Scottish Opera (costumes, Sue Blane)	David Pountney
Seraglio	Scottish Opera (set, David Fielding)	Pountney
1978		
The Way of the World	RSC, Aldwych	John Barton
Vieux Carré	Piccadilly Theatre, London	Keith Hack
Hansel and Gretel	Scottish Opera	Peter Ebert
Die Meistersinger...	Sydney Opera House	Pountney
The Makrapoulos Case	WNO/television	Pountney
Jenufa	Scottish Opera/Houston Grand Opera	Pountney
1979		
Six months work on	Sydney Opera House	project cancelled
Rigoletto	Opera North, Leeds	Patrick Libby
Ernani	WNO	Elijah Moshinsky
Don Giovanni	Scottish Opera	Pountney
Katya Kabanova	Scottish Opera/Sydney Opera House	Pountney
The Golden Cockerel	Scottish Opera	Pountney
The Gambler	Amsterdam (costumes, Blane)	Pountney
1980		
Cunning Little Vixen	Scottish Opera/WNO	Pountney
Tales of Hoffman	ROH, London/television	John Schlesinger
1981		
A Midsummer Night's Dream	RSC	Ron Daniels
The Cherry Orchard	Chichester Festival	Patrick Garland
Jenufa	Houston Grand Opera	Pountney
Don Giovanni	Opera North	Pountney
Queen of Spades	Netherlands Opera	Pountney
1982		
Katya Kabanova	WNO/Opera North/television	Pountney
House of the Dead	WNO/Scottish Opera	Pountney

The Tempest	RSC	Daniels
Werther	Opera North	Stephen Pimlott
1983		
The Gambler	ENO, London (costumes, Blane)	Pountney
Die Walkűre	ENO	Pountney
1984		
Turn of the Screw	Kent Touring Opera	Nic Hytner
Camille	RSC (Other Place) /Comedy Theatre, London	Daniels
Hamlet	RSC (RST)	Daniels
Der Rosenkavalier	ROH	Schlesinger
1985		
The Lonely Road	The Old Vic, London	Christopher Fettes
Donnerstag Aus Licht	ROH	Mike Bogdanov
1986		
Carmen	ENO	Pountney
Creditors	Almeida Theatre, London	Jonathan Kent
Phantom of the Opera	Her Majesty's Theatre, London/ Broadway	Harold Prince
1987		
Queen of Spades	ENO	Pountney
Follies	Shaftsbury Theatre, London	Mike Ockrent
1988		
Phantom of the Opera	Tokyo/Austria/Australia	Prince
Cunning Little Vixen (New production)	ENO	Pountney
1989		
The Marriage of Figaro	Grand Opera, Geneva	Hytner
Aspects of Love	Prince of Wales, London/ Broadway	Trevor Nunn
1990		
Phantom...	Chicago/Hamburg/Ottawa	Prince
The Rise and Fall of The City of Mahagonny	Maggio Musicale, Florence	Graham Vick

1991		
Measure for Measure	RSC (Other Place)/Young Vic	Nunn
The Blue Angel	RSC (Other Place)/West End	Nunn
Cosi Fan Tutte	Glyndebourne	Nunn
The Lulu Plays	Almeida Theatre	Ian McDiarmid
1992/3		
Phantom...	Seattle/Holland/Manchester/ Edinburgh	Prince
1994		
Don Giovanni	Batignano Musica Nel Chiostro	Dalia Ibelhauptaite
Sleeping Beauty	Royal Ballet, ROH	Antony Dowell
Katya Kabanova	ROH	Nunn
1995		
The Rise and Fall of The City of Mahagonny	Bastille Opera, Paris	Vick
1996/7		
Phantom...	Japan/ Far East/Australia/ Switzerland/USA/GB	Prince

INTERVIEW WITH MARIA BJÖRNSON - 11 MAY 1995

What is your ideal working relationship with a director?

I generally find working with directors difficult - although the working method of each director is different. The problematic ones are those who are too academic and you have to work really hard at opening them up visually, but there are also those who only think visually and there's no intellectual exchange between you. What shocks me, having worked for a long time now in the theatre, is how reluctant most directors are to actually go through the text with you. They just won't do it. I've only done it recently with a young director and it was so wonderful. The problem is that the directors I've been working with over the last few years are time freaks. They ration out their time so meanly and you get the impression that what they are saying about the piece they've thought up on the road getting here. One of the most important things for a designer is time. They're just doing too much. Guess how many times I saw Hal Prince before **Phantom of the Opera**? Three.

I find the up-and-coming generation of directors much more visually aware than my generation of directors; although Trevor Nunn can read a rough model better than any other director I have ever worked with. Their requirements and approach differs so much too. I like things to be worked out in detail during discussion so that what I provide can be a stimulus for what happens next but some directors seem to want a space and all the work to start in the rehearsal room. Others want you to have done everything - almost directed it - in advance. The system is often such that directors are asked to do pieces that they know nothing about and they think they can bluff their way through. You can't do that with design. The set would fall down.

What other differences have you found with the new school of younger directors?

I find them much less reserved and guarded in that old Oxbridge manner and more willing to talk about the emotional response to a piece. It's a mutual exploration. There was a period a few years ago when certain designers were courted and productions were definitely 'design led'. I don't think that type of relationship works either. There has to be a coherence of ideas and you hope that a director provides that.

Do you like to try something new and different each time or do you prefer to continue to explore particular concepts?

I'm often rather jealous of designers who continue exploring along particular lines because you can see a clear development in their work, but I actually think it's a bit of a cheat. I think you have to try different ways of solving problems, but if it's your first and only go, the style tends not to be as strong and definite. When you're designing the same set each time, however - and there are some designers who do - then it's time to get out.

The most difficult thing for me is finding the shape and form. The costumes seem to follow on naturally. It's when you're talking about the space you are creating that you need to be close to a director and you are the first person involved before actors or singers and that's when you need to be able to communicate very openly with a director.

Do you get frustrated with what is often seen as a subordinate role? In some

ways you have had to have choreographed it in your head as you work through?

Yes, that's true and it never turns out the way you had hoped or imagined it would - although it might be better.

What do you consider to be good design?

The ideal design is something that is extremely strong and positive. It excites the audience when they first see it and gets them into a mantra of what the piece is about. At the same time it has to be elastic enough to allow development within it. What happens with, for example, musicals, because they are so difficult technically, is that a designer tends to put everything into a straightjacket. Often you have to put a vast amount of scenery into a very tight space, so you're actually designing what happens in the wings as much as what you can see on stage. You might have eighteen different locations so the whole vocabulary of the musical can't be to 'simply suggest'. Also, the simplest ideas are often the most expensive.

When I go to the theatre and I look at other people's work, I like to see the thought processes that have gone into the result. I admit that I'm obviously looking with an experienced eye, but I think an audience should be able to make that kind of sense of the work. Most importantly though, it has to touch you - to affect you. The greatest compliment I have had about my work is not 'how stylish' but 'I don't know how or why, but it really moved me'.

How do you view long partnerships with directors - for example, the Janacek cycle with David Pountney?

You do get tired of one another. That's a normal human reaction. And it shows in the

work. A lot of directors shy away from long relationships and work with several different people - Peter Sellars does. Directors tend to have far more work than designers. Once you feel you are just carrying out instructions from a director - that's the time to change partners.

Do you like working with directors who come to a piece with a strong visual idea, or set of ideas?

If each time you see a director's work, although he has had a different designer, it still looks the same, then I think his input is too strong. On a scale of badness if you like - I've worked with directors who've made me so miserable by squashing every idea, there are those who contribute virtually nothing and then there are those who come with intractable visual ideas that are terrible!

Has this made you want to get in the driving seat and become a director?

No. It's too late and I haven't got the patience. It does require a certain talent and part of that talent is persuading a huge amount of people - rather than just the workshop - to do what you want. I'd find that very wearing. I think you need the input of different disciplines and sometimes a designer/director's production suffers from being too visual without enough attention being paid to the meaning of the language. But I do envy the director sometimes. His job is so light. In the rehearsal room you can change an idea just like that and people will laugh about it. It isn't heavy and morbid and claustrophobic in the way designing can be. You hope the result isn't - I'm talking about the process. In this country, there is so much emphasis put on the model that you find yourself putting an awful lot into it. I think a model is necessary to get the plastic, 3D impression you need and I do think you can identify work which has come

straight from two dimensional drawings, just as musicals have a certain look. It's inevitable when you're given seven and a half inches of scene - that's the space - what can you do with that? The model for, say, **Phantom of the Opera** was really complicated. Only once have I not made a model because there wasn't time and that was at the Glasgow Cits. We built from rough sketches and that was fantastic. I wish that it could be recognized that different types of pieces should be approached with different design methods.

Would you like to be able to work in a more fluid way than you do?

Oh yes. When I was at the Cits. (Glasgow Citizens Theatre), because it was a company, you knew the actors who you were designing for, the people in the workshop and so on. The trouble is now that the bigger the work, the greater the outlay and so models have to be incredibly detailed to avoid cock-ups. The ideal situation would be for the company to have a six-month rehearsal period during which time you could get together - actors, director and designer and go through the text in order to share the vision. Then they would do their work and I could come back with various options and so on. The tradition that on the first day of rehearsal of a play you show the model is a quite pointless one. All that happens is that the actors make witty comments to cover their nervousness - most of them haven't been educated to read a model properly and a lot of them are surprisingly unadventurous about created space - levels, perspective and so on. I do think that's changing though. Most of the younger actors seem to be more visually orientated and media conscious than was the case twenty years ago, and the same goes for directors. During that period in Britain they were almost exclusively Oxbridge - very articulate but with no visual vocabulary. When I first started out and I was at Glasgow Cits., I asked a group of actors to participate in designing **King Lear**. After a week they came back with

some sketches of square shaped garments, which I described as Tetley tea-bags and they told me they were having problems with deciding how thick the wall should be behind. I was quite surprised. I'd hope it would be different today. It might have been something to do with the fact that it was that Philip Prowse infused everything at the Cits. with his style that they felt intimidated, or they might have wanted something as simple as possible as a reaction. Whatever the reasons, it didn't work.

Did you enjoy working at Glasgow Citizens?

Tremendously. It was marvelous to go there straight out of college because the whole theatre company was completely tuned in to the visual. Because Philip Prowse was a designer-director, which was unusual then, working there as a designer you really felt that people wanted to help you. I loved the experience of working really hard on a show that was about to go on and at the same time seeing your last one being smashed up. I found that so liberating. It spoilt me I think, because it wasn't until I left that I realized how political an arena the theatre can be. Battling your way through can be a nightmare - wondering what you can do when a set has been badly interpreted in the making or subtly deadened. And that smashing process avoided the preoccupation that some designers have today of developing a recognizable style and being able to show the progression of that style. It's a kind of visual personality cult.

Do you enjoy doing musicals?

There's a lot of intellectual snobbery about musicals - and envy - because I'm not denying it's very well paid. And it can be tremendously stimulating technically. Often you're working with some of the best lighting designers, sound engineers etc. that can be found. The problem is whether the content warrants all this vast amount of talent

and money.

Given the choice, what would you like to do now?

I'd like to do something for myself - something private - sculpture actually. There are two aspects of being a theatre designer that get to me - one is being so publicly rated and assessed. I went to a party the other day and someone said 'Hello. What are you doing now?' What about 'How are you?' I thought. The second is that you work really hard to do your bit to get these shows on - teams of assistants, all-nighters and so on - but the final effect, once it's been constructed, is never as good as you had originally created. It always feels diluted. What will be difficult I know, is not having deadlines. I'm so used to working under that kind of pressure. What I will enjoy though, is having time to actually experience first-hand some of the things that I'm often expected to interpret. When you're sitting at home all day working, you can only rely on secondary sources. I'm only doing one show a year at the moment because the projects tend to be so big, particularly as I like to do both set and costumes. For **Sleeping Beauty,** there were over a hundred and fifty costumes. That's a lot of drawing - I don't use assistants for costumes - and sometimes you wonder if you, personally, as a creative artist, are learning anything or getting anything out of it except the fee.

You teach at Central St. Martin's don't you?

I don't teach, I judge. And I'm giving that up soon. There are just too many of them to assess in an ever more restricted space. Last year, I found I didn't even get to know

their names. And what's going to happen to them all? Where do they think they are

going to work?

What are your main influences, do you think?

They change. I was, like several other designers, influenced by the German and East European aesthetic; and then more recently I've been exploring surrealism and the appeal to the unconscious - I'm not sure at the moment. Perhaps you can only identify influences in retrospect. I think my work is moving closer towards sculpture all the time. You'll see that with **Mahagonny** at the Bastille (**The City of Mahagonny,** Bastille Opera, Paris. Director, Graham Vick).

You've said you rely on assistants to get the model out on time. There seems to be quite a sub-culture of design assistants. How do you recruit them?

Like most things in the theatre - word of mouth. It's a bit like casting - different assistants are good at different aspects. It's very unfortunate, because they're paid really badly. I suppose it's a sort of apprenticeship, but often they're exploited. In some ways I'd like to do some smaller- scale work, but I don't want to go back to the beg, borrow and steal situation again - working with a tiny budget.

Do you think critics properly understand the visual content of a show?

They're better than they were. At least you don't got the 'simple but effective' anymore. Talking to Stephen Daldry we came up with the idea of casting critics. I thought that was a nice idea - although you can't see it ever happening. We'd get them

all together and decide which one of them we would allow to write about our shows,

based on their ability. Generally speaking, they don't know their painters, their architects or their costume periods. Some of them are visually illiterate. I don't think critics have caught up with the fact that designers have raised their profile - their contribution is finally being recognized by the public as well as by people in the business.

TOM CAIRNS

WORK	COMPANY/VENUE	DIRECTOR
1984		
Hedda Gabler	Almeida, London	Tim Albery
Mrs Gauguin	Almeida	Mike Bradwell
1985		
Don Giovanni	Opera 80	Stephen Pimlott
The Daughter-in-Law	Crucible, Sheffield	Pimlott
Messiah	Lyric, Hammersmith/ National Theatre of Brent	Jude Kelly
1986		
Philistines	RSC	Tom Caird
Accidental Death of an Anarchist	Crucible	Jane Collins
Edward II	Royal Exchange, Manchester	Nic Hytner
The Trojans	Opera North	Albery/ Antony McDonald
1987		
Twelfth Night	Crucible	Pimlott
The Winter's Tale	Crucible	**Tom Cairns**
The Trojans, Part 2	WNO	Albery
1988		
The Park	Crucible	Pimlott
Billy Budd	ENO	Albery/McDonald
The Midsummer Marriage	Scottish Opera	Albery/McDonald
Samson and Delilah	Bregenz Festival	Pimlott
The Lady From the Sea	Citizens Theatre, Glasgow	**Cairns**
School for Clowns	Sadlers Wells Theatre Company	Martin Duncan
1989		
La Finta Giardiniera	Opera North	Albery
1990		
Beatrice and Benedict	ENO	Albery/McDonald
Sunday in the Park with George	RNT, Olivier	Pimlott
It's Gonna Rain	London Contemporary Dance Theatre	Aletta Collins
L'Heure Espagnole/	Opera North	Duncan

Gianni Schicchi Miss Julie	Greenwich Theatre, London	**Cairns**
1991		
King Priam	Opera North	**Cairns**
La Bohème	Wurtemburg State Opera, Stuttgart	**Cairns**
Shoes	LCDT	**Cairns**
Benvenuto Cellini	Netherlands Opera	Albery/McDonald
1992		
Don Giovanni	Scottish Opera	**Cairns**
Samson and Delilah	Netherlands Opera	Pimlott
1994		
Un Ballo in Maschera	Bavarian State Opera	**Cairns**
The Second Mrs Kong	Glyndebourne	**Cairns**
1995		
This is the Picture	Aletta Collins Dance Co.	**Cairns/Collins**
Jenufa	Opera North	**Cairns**
King Priam (rev Op North)	Flanders Opera	**Cairns**
1996		
A Delicate Balance	Playhouse, Nottingham	**Cairns**
The Second Mrs Kong	Glyndebourne and tour	**Cairns**

FILMS

Alistair Fish BBC/Arts Council **Cairns**
(Ist Prize 1994 Art Film Festival at Trecianske Teplice, Slovakia)
The Storm **Cairns**

INTERVIEW WITH TOM CAIRNS - 12 APRIL 1995

Why have you moved from being designer to designer/director?

I'm not conscious of the moment of decision. I've always worked with directors who want more from a designer than a set of drawings. I felt I had the freedom to make directorial decisions both at the initial stages and during rehearsal.

Don't you miss the dynamic of collaboration, particularly during the gestation of ideas?

I have a particular relationship with a choreographer called Aletta Collins who, in opera, has always worked very closely with me and latterly has had the credit of co-director.

How does that working relationship operate?

It's difficult to say exactly. It's mostly something coming out of trust and respect. We have similar tastes. It's not simply that she does the moving and I do the visuals - the skills intertwine. Her movements are quite gestural and not usually abstract. The demarcation is our own which is refreshing.

Did your decision to direct come out of frustration?

I don't think so. I was attached to the Crucible Theatre, Sheffield as an 'associate artist' - as we called ourselves. We were invited by Clare Venables to open up the possibilities of a repertory theatre. I was involved in all sorts of decision-making and the pecking order effectively dissolved. Then Clare asked me to direct something in the Studio. It was a

perfect initiation in that I had such supportive people around me. I almost took it for granted that it was possible and it takes me by surprise that people find it unusual. This was during the period of working with Antony McDonald, so I was collaborating there as well.

Also it's fair to say that I wasn't in the centre of the 'design Mafia'. I can say that because most of my friends are designers! I wasn't doing two shows a year for the RSC and I think one of the reasons was that, unconsciously perhaps, I was interested in working within a more fluid structure. For example, I've just devised an hour-long piece with a writer, Helen Cooper, and a choreographer - which we workshopped for eight weeks.

How do you deal with the work load of designing and directing opera - particularly a big new one like <u>The Second Mrs Kong</u> for Glyndebourne?

I take on less. What I mean by that is that I do one big thing a year and possibly a couple of revivals. A lot of directors stack one show up on to the other. I couldn't do that. And a lot of designers do a huge amount of work. When you talk to Antony, ask him to tell you what he's designing this year! It's possible to do this because as a director/designer of course I get not quite two fees, but a significant amount more than one.

I got the impression, as a member of the audience for your last show at Glyndebourne, that the singers were particularly comfortable on quite a complicated set. What was the design process for <u>The Second Mrs Kong</u>?

The key is time. Glyndebourne, as a Festival Theatre, has the luxury of time. They put the designs up even before you begin rehearsal. I had *three days* with the lighting designer and technical crew. This is very unusual. And the singers were able to familiarise

themselves physically with the set in a rehearsal context and to explore its possibilities. It was a designer/director's dream. Conditions and scheduling are terribly important if you are combining the jobs.

What makes collaborative ventures collapse, do you think?

One inevitably thinks of the great German partnerships - Stein and Hermann for example - and they were always held up as the great icons of how work can thrive and develop when the team is constant, but they don't work together any more, except for the odd show. Interestingly, Hermann now directs. There was a period when, apart from working with Stephen Pimlott, I worked exclusively with Tim (Albery) and Antony (McDonald). In the end it's a question of losing creative energy - of running out of steam. It's difficult to define. It worked for so long because we really did have an equal input. It wasn't as though Antony was doing the sets and I was doing the costumes - it was more integrated than that. And Tim always allowed plenty of time for discussion and is good at it. It's time again. Mind you, it's a busy old world and you could sit in a room with some directors for a month and get nowhere! There are directors - to give them credit - who trust designers to the extent that they know what they'll get. They have chosen a designer for a particular aesthetic. I don't think you get the most interesting work this way, but it happens. I couldn't work like that.

You're about to start work on <u>Jenufa</u>. Can you do a step by step analysis of your working process?

Not all the casting is done by audition. Unlike theatre, there is a limited number of singers who can handle certain rôles. There are people whose work you know and there are people you are introduced to. Then there is the availability problem. Singers get booked

up years in advance sometimes. You could say, if you were going to divide the rôles, that my directorial responsibilities come first, but it's never been a rigid demarcation in my expérience - when I worked as a designer I was involved with the casting. Then I start 'designing' it. I gather together as much research material - mainly visual - as I can and stick it up all over my studio.

Don't you find it distracting in this designer period of visual immersion and concentration that you have to field a lot of the practical queries that a director would otherwise have to deal with?

It can be slightly annoying, but apart from the odd very focused days, I prefer to work within a looser structure. I don't tend to have great moments of inspiration, nor do I lock the door for four weeks and then release the smoke signal HE'S DONE IT! I draw a lot and I use an assistant to build models. I like the model to look good but I'm not a techno nut. My tools are very basic. You are, after all, trying to sell this concept not to yourself if you're the director as well, but to the people who are going to build it and light it. The model is stylistically important too. You can convey the feel of the piece through the materials you use in the model.

By the first day of rehearsal, do you have a very strong idea about how the space will be used?

Oh yes. There's no room for improvisation in opera.

What about in theatre? In your experience as director/designer, can theatre be more organic in its development?

Funnily enough, I've just finished working on a devised piece. We rehearsed for eight weeks, and three weeks before the technical rehearsal, we designed the set. And that had to be done in a day. I normally take two months! We didn't have much money - about £9000 for set and costumes - so we made the model in a day and had it built in two weeks. Recently I've been used to having a lot more money than that, designing it at least six months in advance and it taking about three months to build.

Did you enjoy the challenge or did you think 'Oh God - been here before.'?

The problem is that there's not much you can do in a fortnight. That's the disadvantage of being organic. If you are well planned in advance, you can get the set made cheaper by deploying the workshops more efficiently for example, and then you can rehearse with it and be comfortable with it. Contrary to the common view, opera singers are often prepared to be more experimental in the way they work with the set then actors are. I used to find the idea of designing an opera set six months in advance ridiculous, but you begin to see the advantages.

What about costumes?

I do try to talk through characterization with singers or actors before finalizing any drawings.

Are you concerned that an audience may not be reading your design in the way you intended it to be read?

I think if you are over-concerned about that, you'll be attempting to reach an impossible number of individuals who would all interpret the design differently. In the end, you have

to do it for yourself. You have to do what seems right for you. I think you have to try to be innovative - and that's what differentiates your work from an advertisement, because advertising uses familiar images and relies on what were once new and original art forms, but are now common currency.

Are you influenced by the work of other designers?

Not consciously. Obviously one soaks up a lot of what one sees, but I'm not aware of any specific influence.

Have you designed any Shakespeare?

Yes. **Hamlet, Twelfth Night** and **A Winter's Tale**.

Shakespeare frightens me a bit, bores me a bit, but I think, as a designer, you should be given a free hand. You have so much choice. With so much in the text you can take any line you want. I think Shakespeare allows for an emotional response - is it light or is it heavy, wet or dry?

Is it because we are so saturated visually in our promo-video culture that we have to have striking visual amplification of the words in the text and aren't content to use our imagination in the way Shakespeare constantly exhorts us?

You may be right. But an empty stage is a statement too.

Do you think critics understand design?

Designers are often providing something fairly sophisticated - they have developed their craft over the years - whereas, generally speaking, opera critics are knowledgeable about music and drama critics concentrate on the verbal text and the performances. This isn't a problem except that they pronounce with the same authority about design and they simply haven't come on the journey with you. Their visual education and awareness isn't on a par with their knowledge of music or literature.

Does your opera work inform your theatre work and vice versa?

Opera allowed the great charge into abstraction in the eighties in a way that theatre never had in this country and despite a backlash debate happening at the moment about putting **Traviata** back in the drawing room, what was going on then has had a huge effect on theatre design. Most designers cross over from opera to theatre in a way that directors and performers don't, so there is bound to be visual cross-fertilisation.

Are there particular spaces that you prefer to work in?

Proscenium arch - because it turns a piece of work into a painting. It gives you the control that working in the round doesn't. The limitations of working in the round - sightlines and so on - make the work visually less interesting. It's much more about the actor and the text, which is fine, but it's not where my interest lies.

DEIRDRE CLANCY

WORK	COMPANY/VENUE	SET DESIGNER	DIRECTOR
1980			
Enjoy	Richmond Theatre/ Vaudeville	**Deirdre Clancy**	Ronald Eyre
The Wiz	Crucible Theatre, Sheffield	Roger Butlin	Peter James
1981			
Heartbreak House	Royal Exchange, Manchester	**Clancy**	Jonathan Hales
The Crucible	RNT, London	Haydn Griffin	Bill Bryden
Ariadne Auf Naxos	ENO, London	Douglas Harp	Jeremy J. Taylor
Eugene Onegin	Glasgow/Rome/ Monte Carlo	Butlin	David Pountney
Don Quixote	RNT	Bill Dudley	Bryden
1982			
Cosi Fan Tutte	Metropolitan Opera, N.Y.	Griffin	Colin Graham
1983			
A Midsummer Night's Dream	RNT	Bob Crowley	Bryden
Victory	Joint Stock Theatre Co.	**Clancy**	Danny Boyle
1984			
Henry VIII	RSC	Griffin	Howard Davies
Two Planks and a Passion	Greenwich Theatre	**Clancy**	Boyle
Strange Interlude	Nederlander Theater/ N.Y.	Voytek	Keith Hack
Wild Honey	RNT/L.A.	John Gunter	C. Morahan
1985			
The Way Of The World	Chichester Festival	Griffin	Bill Gaskill
Candida	Guthrie Theatre, Minneapolis	**Clancy**	Gaskill
The Government Inspector	RNT	Gunter	Richard Eyre

1986			
Mephisto	RSC	Gunter	Adrian Noble
1987			
Annie Get Your Gun	Chichester Festival	Butlin	David Gilmore
Twelfth Night	RSC	Clancy	Bill Alexander
1988			
Bitter Sweet	New Sadlers Wells	Russell Grant	Ian Judge
The Admirable Crichton	Theatre Clwyd, Mold	Griffin	Frith Banbury
Macbeth	Shoshiku Co., Japan	Clancy	Giles Block
Lohengrin	Stadttheatr,Wiesbaden, Germany	Russell Grant	Judge
1989			
The Fairy Queen	Aix-en-Provence	Clancy	Noble
Juno and the Paycock	RNT	Clancy	Peter Gill
1990			
Attila	Opera North	Gunter	Judge
1991			
Henry IV Parts1& 2	RSC	Bob Crowley	Noble
The Pretenders	RSC	Clancy	Boyle
1992			
Flying Dutchman	ROH	Gunter	Judge
Tales of Hoffman	Houston Grand Opera	Tim Goodchild	Judge
1993			
Norma	Graz Opera, Austria	Gunter	Judge
1994			
A Month in the Country	Albery Theatre and GB tour	Griffin	Bryden
Twelfth Night	RSC	Gunter	Judge
Pygmalion	Chichester Festival	Clancy	Patrick Garland

1995			
Love's Labour's Lost	RSC	Gunter	Judge
1996			
Troilus and Cressida	RSC	Gunter	Judge
1997			
A Doll's House	Playhouse Theatre/ Broadway	**Clancy**	Anthony Page

INTERVIEW WITH DEIRDRE CLANCY - 12 NOVEMBER 1996 at RNT

You're known primarily for designing costumes, which involves working with a set designer. Is this how you prefer to operate?

One doesn't really make those kinds of choices - they're made for you. I have enjoyed recently doing **A Doll's House** where I designed both set and costume. It was a great relief for once not to have to fit in with another person. If I want to use a particular colour, I just go ahead without having to consult anyone else. Even the way you phrased the question - the costume designer is seen as working *with* - if not *for* the set designer, not the other way round. The set tends to be designed first. It's unusual, although not unheard of, for the costumes to be the primary impulse. It is true that if what you specialise in is costumes, you finally get exasperated with being so far down the line of creativity. You feel you've got - and have deserved - a certain authority and you can't help wondering why you are having to compromise and deal with people not so ...experienced, let's say. Why can't they deal with me? - you wonder. But being a costume designer is not the job for someone with an inflated ego. There's too much collaboration. There *are* opportunities to show off - particularly in opera, or cabaret, where you don't have character to worry about. If getting your own way is of paramount importance to you, you're better off designing the set where you're less likely to be interfered with. And the understanding of costumes - particularly by critics - is still at a very primitive level.

As you say, there are exceptions where costumes take priority. I'm thinking of Sue Blane's Rocky Horror Show costumes, for example. Has any of your work been 'costume led' would you say?

I suppose it happened with **Tales of Hoffman**. The concept was in fact my idea and everyone else slotted into it, which actually rather alarmed the director.

There have been some very fruitful partnerships with particular set designers, haven't there? John Gunter, Bob Crowley, Haydn Griffin ... Does the working process vary according to the personality involved?

It tends to be extraordinarily casual and informal. John and I have worked together on and off for such a long time that I only need to see what he's up to at the early model stage. The conceptual discussion related to the set will already have occurred with the director. That's not to say that I always *agree* with the concept but, professionally, it's my job to go along with it. There are many years of shared experience so there's bound to be a shared visual vocabulary.

Is your job to underline or 'say' the same things visually as the set designer, do you think?

No. It is a matter of emphasis, and that can vary. **Flying Dutchman** was very much John's show with me fitting in whereas **Norma** was the other way round.

How would you describe the relationship in <u>Troilus and Cressida</u>?

Pretty even I would say.

Really? Because as a spectator, I felt that the set and the costume were saying quite different things. The costumes were bodybuilding, nineties, gay sauna with a bit of S and M whereas the set was a portentous abstract statement about war. The

costumes had life whereas, for me, the set didn't.

What's wrong with that? I like there to be a creative tension. I actually like putting costumes in a different period from the set. Not only is it exciting because it's unexpected but it actually has a greater realism because the location invariably pre-dates what people are wearing. The idea of an eighteenth-century costume in an eighteenth - century house is neither interesting nor accurate. Secondly, it can - as with John and me - be a matter of our having different temperaments. And then, perhaps most pertinently, employing this creative tension allows the two aspects of the text to be pointed up - the costumes indicate the sexier, fun side of this war, whereas John's set was deliberately grimmer and more sombre. I think that the combination is entirely appropriate.

Do you tend to go through the set designer as a means of sharing the director's interpretation of the piece?

Absolutely not. Initial discussions are with the director, sometimes with the set designer present. Then the model is made and the set is sorted. Then I'll have a separate meeting with the director, bringing some initial scribbles. After that there will be a second meeting with more finished sketches. Any other arrangement would relegate the position of costume designer to assistant designer. Of course there is an ego problem, but if I weren't properly and individually consulted I would find it difficult to go un-miffed.

So would you say that a costume designer can be more organic in her approach? Conventionally, sets are built first and have to be decided upon earlier, don't they?

Yes. And that makes it an enjoyable process in that you have time to respond to the bodies you are dressing and you have the opportunity to see them moving in rehearsal.

How much do you listen to actors' opinions as to what they feel they should be wearing?

I do listen to them, but they are often curiously uncertain and actually prefer a sounding board. Sometimes they really don't have any ideas. Time and again actors have actually said 'How lovely to see the drawing. Now I know how to play the part.' That makes me feel I've got it right. I do, as far as possible, incorporate their feelings. I realize how agonising it must be to appear in a wig one hates or in a dress that makes one feel fat or whatever. Ian Judge, the director of **Troilus** with whom I've worked several times, actually gets rather cross when I consult the actors. I think it's rather arrogant and self-defeating to impose something on an actor that s/he doesn't feel happy with. On the other hand, I don't think that I have ever put an actor in anything that I disapprove of. What's interesting is that sometimes a third idea emerges that neither of us had come up with directly.

Presumably you have a particular idea about how your costumes should be used. Do you tend to be disappointed?

Yes - usually, but not always. There are those who look like candidates for the un-made-bed-of-the-year award, but then there are those who surprise you with their inventiveness.

I particularly admired the dress Judi Dench wore in Absolute Hell. How much was you and how much was her?

We worked through it together really - the look produced by that bottom in a corselet, the little plump legs and the high heels and so on. It obviously would have been quite a different effect with Diana Rigg. It really was a bit of both of us.

Presumably you must find a lot of satisfaction in interpreting and projecting character?

Of course I do, yes. I probably get my ideas through more than most (costume designers) because I'm more interested in creating something organically that comes out of the bodies of the people I'm dealing with than in imposing some sort of vision entirely out of my own head.

What are the different considerations for you when you work in opera as opposed to theatre?

You're working with a broader brush and there is this thing called chorus. Fifty - a hundred even - people who appear and move together. Unless you're doing the Greek Plays, in theatre you don't usually have to deal with such large groups of people filling up a space in this way.

Are there particular tricks or techniques you adopt to suggest character through costume? To give an example off the top of my head, might a man's trousers being too short suggest social inadequacy?

Yes of course, but I can't give particular examples. On the whole, the audiences don't pick up those details either. They tend to think that when a coat is too big or something is too tight, or a jacket is a bit wristy, that it simply happened that way, rather than it being a particular signpost. Other designers notice it but most people don't.

That surprises me, because the language of clothes is surely made up of a common vocabulary?

It amazes me how little people apply their everyday knowledge of dress to costumes they see on the stage. Critics even less. It irritates me sometimes but the approval we all need has to come from one's peers. If it gets through to an audience, that's a bonus, but I think, generally speaking, an audience wants and expects display more than the post-modernist school of directors - and designers - realize.

Is that the influence of the big Lloyd-Webber musicals do you think?

No, not at all. It's a deep-seated expectation that going to the theatre should involve seeing people in 'nice' costumes.

An extension of the wish-fulfillment, Noel Coward/Cecil Beaton elegance....

Yes. People ring up the RSC to ask if the production is going to be 'traditional' or in bin liners and string vests. And then they don't come if they hear the latter. They don't want to be challenged or threatened. People should tell directors this. Of course they don't.

I did an audience survey and one of the questions was 'Do you prefer costumes to be of a recognisable period?' Twenty-three out of the thirty-two replied that they did.

Luckily with **Troilus** it was possible to give the impression of period costume.

Whatever that is. Are we talking about Elizabethan fashion or ancient Greek 'as it really was' or Shakespeare's idea of ancient Greek, or our idea of Shakespeare's idea?

Exactly.

I saw the show twice and it interests me that at the end of the Stratford run, the male bodies were more covered than at the beginning. Were you involved with that decision?

Not at all. But I wouldn't have objected because in the first instance I thought a lot of the nudity or near-nudity was unnecessary. I was pleased with the look of the costumes because they were quite brave, but where people felt uncomfortable being relatively naked, then I had no problem about them wearing more clothes. There was no agenda about not wearing trousers.

What was your agenda for the costumes then?

It's a fantastically sexy play. It really is an unbelievably homoerotic piece. You cannot read it without being affected by the open homosexuality. Achilles and Patroclus are literally dying from too much sex. And there's Pandarus dying of an AIDS-like disease at the end. I found it shocking and I found the only way to do it was to go with the outrage. My response was very similar to working on Bond's **Early Morning** when I was twenty-three. It was alien to my thought processes, but far from being embarrassed and type-casting myself as a middle-aged lady designer, I went the other way and the drawings were very sexy and very beautiful.

How did the actors respond to the drawings for Troilus?

Terrified. Absolutely terrified. They thought 'Oh my God, we've got to show our bottoms!', and 'How am I supposed to have a body like that?' They were much more self-conscious about it than the females.

Presumably they worked out at the gym?

Yes, most of them did. And there were some very good bodies on display.

I thought it was very witty. The first sight of the Trojans on their march past was so wonderfully self-regarding and preening. It had all the tension of the display of their gym-trimmed bodies at a gay sauna.

Exactly. But of course none of the characters would consider themselves homosexual. They were just incredibly hyped up from the war - and eating all that meat - and they screwed anything that was available. In fact the one great love story is really Achilles and Patroclus.

And yet you put Jeremy Sheffield (Patroclus) - the most beautiful member of the cast - in a skirt.

Well, of course. He's a dancer so he wore it beautifully. The black leather sarongs became a huge success. You just had to be sure they hung from the hip and not the waist. Working with a homosexual director, I felt the interpretation needed the balance of my female heterosexuality.

And you put the wit into it.

I'm glad you got that out of it, because I found a lot of it very funny.

I found the first half rather over-blocked and formal with a lot of swishing of cloaks and so on. Did you?

Well, Ian's done a lot of opera... some of the cast found it difficult, I know. Victoria Hamilton (Cressida), in particular. She actually sent me a very sweet note on the first night thanking me for allowing her costume to be created organically. She enjoyed discussing costume although, in the end, she wore what I had intended for her from the beginning! In fact it was the same dress in different colours because that was what worked best for her. She was too little to clutter up.

What was your view about the sound - particularly given the current thinking that it should be approached and developed in a way similar to set and costume?

Well, I'm married to a stage composer, so I have some idea of what works. The process makes it very difficult to make radical changes. But I agree that it does flavour the visual experience.

What do you feel about the pre-production imagery and how it affects a spectator's expectation of the visual content? I'm thinking of the Clare Parke's intertwined hetero-erotic figures on the leaflets, in the programme, and so on.

The fact that the images 'went for it' whole-heartedly was a good thing. Again and again I was struck by the fact that whatever we did, there was almost no way that we could go beyond what Shakespeare had written.

Turning to <u>A Dolls House</u>. You designed both set and costume for that production. I haven't yet seen it, but can you describe how you dealt with the way Ibsen uses the bourgeois home as a sort of metaphor for society's hypocrisy?

The first thing to point out is that I had a week to do it. The set designer had resigned. I had to stick with the existing ground plan, but I did manage to get rid of one of the many doors and move the front door further downstage so that the entire audience could see the letter box instead of very few of them. Antony did not want it to be an abstract design nor did he want the ending to be pre-empted. He wanted to keep the piece in the realm of a middle class couple struggling to make ends meet. The other thing to remember is that Janet McTeer (Nora) is six foot one. The doors had to be very big, so as not to make her look odd, and other things I made larger-than-life as well. In the end you were only aware of her height when she wasn't in character, taking her curtain call.

Are there any subtleties that go largely unnoticed in this production?

The scale- and the fact that the set is built out of wooden sheets. If you are observant, you can see the grain beneath the washes of colour. That gave it the Scandinavian flavour we were looking for. I was pleased with the result because I hate painted sets.

Is there a particular genre that you prefer to work in?

One of the reasons I'm a designer is that I have a low boredom threshold. Mentally, I'm onto the next project down the line. I'm designing the costumes for a film at the moment, which I've never done before. I did two big paintings earlier this year, which was fun. No whingeing actors!

Where did you train?

I was at Birmingham with Philip Prowse. I've never worked at the Cits. - only because where one works is so much a matter of chance.

Given your now considerable experience, have you been attracted to the idea of doing any teaching?

It's difficult to fit it all in and it doesn't do to say no too often to design work. I'm an examiner at Wimbledon School of Art and that is interesting. What I have found in the up-and-coming generation of costume designers is a very real fear of sexual display. You can see this in the way they dress - exquisite figures utterly disguised. The grunge image is very pervasive. When they come to design for theatre they are hampered by a very real lack of body awareness and that is evident in their drawings. It's politically un-correct to be sexy. Their approach to period costume is very bland. Whether this is because they have problems with line drawing or whether their knowledge of period costume is shaky or whether they simply don't like it, or it's a combination, I don't know.

How can that awareness be engendered?

It's simply a matter of fashion I think. Street fashion is fine but it's exercising a very negative influence at present.

The other problem is economic. Because they don't get proper grants, they are nearly all working as well as studying - stacking shelves at Tesco's or whatever. Inevitably they suffer from a lack of total immersion in their subject. And they can't afford to go to the theatre, poor things. Also, they don't have either the literary background that my generation has - they don't have to read *all* of Shakespeare's tragedies to write an essay - nor do they have the breadth of Art History education that one used to get with Art History A level. They don't know their architecture. It's not their fault, but today's students just don't have the background. That, coupled with their inexperience, makes it

very difficult for them. This may be acceptable for set design where the abstract often works, but to design costume you have to build on a firm foundation and a greater rigour is necessary.

WILLIAM DUDLEY

WORK	COMPANY/VENUE	DIRECTOR
1984		
The Ring Cycle	Bayreuth	Peter Hall
1985		
The Critic	RNT, London	Sheila Hancock
The Real Inspector Hound	RNT	Tom Stoppard
The Merry Wives of Windsor	RSC, Stratford	Bill Alexander
I Claudius	West End	Tony Richardson
Mutiny!	West End	Michael Bogdanov
1986		
The Futurists	RNT	Richard Eyre
Richard II	RSC	Barry Kyle
A Midsummer Night's Dream	RSC	Alexander
1987		
Entertaining Strangers	RNT	Hall
Waiting For Godot	RNT	Michael Rudman*
Kiss Me Kate	West End	Adrian Noble
1988		
Cat On A Hot Tin Roof	RNT	Howard Davies
The Changeling	RNT	Eyre
The Shaughraun	RNT	Davies*
Bartholomew Fair	RNT	Eyre
1989		
The Voysey Inheritance	RNT	Eyre*
The Cunning Little Vixen	Royal Opera House, London	Bill Bryden
Un Ballo In Maschera	Salzburg Festival	John Schlesinger
1990		
The Crucible	RNT	Davies
Lucia Di Lammermoor	Chicago Opera	Andrei Serban
1991		
The Coup	RNT	Roger Michell
Matador	West End	Elijah Moshinsky
Idomeneo	WNO	Davies

The Ship	Harland and Wolf, Glasgow	Bryden
1992		
Pygmalion	RNT	Davies
The Rise and Fall Of Little Voice	RNT	Sam Mendes
Heartbreak House	West End	Trevor Nunn
1993		
On the Ledge	RNT	Robin Lefevre
1994		
Johnny On A Spot	RNT	Eyre
My Night With Reg	West End	Michell
The Big Picnic	Harland and Wolf, Glasgow	Bryden
1995		
Under Milk Wood	RNT	Michell
Wild Oats	RNT	Jeremy Sams
Rat In The Skull	West End	Stephen Daldry
1996		
Mary Stuart	RNT	Davies
The General From America	RSC	Davies
Some Sunny Day	West End	Michell

* Set only

INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM DUDLEY - 13 MAY 1995

How would you define your role as a designer?

To find a visual world or space in which the play can take place and to help define the character of the players within that world. I like the analogy of my fish tank. You buy the tank and put the water in with some pebbles and weeds and then, weeks later - you've got to let the eco system build up - you finally put in the fish. I always get that buzz at the technical rehearsal when the first character comes on in costume, even if nothing's lit, seeing them inhabit the world that's been constructed for them. If I've got it at all right, there's a sense of fitness of things.

Do you prefer working out the design in advance of rehearsals?

Prefer doesn't really come into it. The economics are such, in this country, that it's the way most of us have to work. The materials we have to use aren't nearly as malleable as an actor's voice and body or a writer's words. Costume is easier to alter, but even that involves a lot of extra cost, so in the fitting room I try to make sure that an actor feels happy and hope that what I'm giving him will help him find his character, and in the drawings, rather than an approximation, I try to predict as clearly as possible what an actor can become. I listen to their ideas - luckily here at the National, with a six week rehearsal period you can afford to - but in the end, I didn't do the training I've done or design the number of shows I have in order to go off with a clothes shopping list. Bless 'em. If you're not careful, it's 'the camel is a horse designed by committee' syndrome, isn't it?

What do you consider to be the ideal working relationship with a director?

That's such a good question because it's so central to the life of a designer. I feel that I'm only as good as the director I'm working with. The quality of the director, I would say, is more important than the quality of the text. I'd rather work with a good director on a bad text than the other way round. My best experiences have all been as a result of working with particularly good directors and the gulf between good and bad is enormous - as any actor will tell you. The optimum period seems to be after a build-up of two or three shows which, although they may not have been critical successes you personally feel you have achieved something. I see it as a marriage of different skills. If a director has had a literary or classical education and a designer has some of that but comes from an art school training, then the skills are complementary. You both support and give way to one another.

What about the balance of power?

The director is clearly the senior partner. It's not a marriage of equals - nor would I ever want it like that. A director's responsibility is wider. It's not about fair play - you could say that a designer puts in more hours over a longer period, gets paid significantly less and often is the one who ignites the first spark to light the journey of the show. Where a good director shows his particular skill is in his ability to cajole and manipulate people. I don't have that. He or she can cope with the roaring egos and raging factions within companies and deal with authors. It's a great sight, seeing, as I have occasionally, a good director shepherding the flock into the fold. This authority is something I admire and don't possess. I've never wanted to be a director. I like to be involved at the important stages such as casting and music and obviously lighting. When I first started, designers weren't expected to have even that input. Now I can be asked for my opinion on whether a certain actor should be replaced. I enjoy this involvement and I see it as part of the job of designing.

In the initial stages, the first meeting, what in your opinion makes you feel this is going to be a good relationship?

Either they give me a sentence which opens up a whole area to investigate, or, if I come up with an idea off the top of my head, they take it and develop it in a way I wouldn't have thought of. If that happens you're really cooking on gas. It's a sort of leap-frogging conversation - each idea overtaking the other. The faster it happens the better. It's like the fax machine handshake - you lock your signals together.

What if ideas simply aren't gelling? How do you go forward?

You do find yourself going up blind alleyways and all you can do, both of you, is be totally up front and start again. It happened on **Under Milk Wood** recently. I worked on it through Christmas and I found I was going along a false trail. We'd agreed on the idea and then the director went on holiday, and when he came back, he said he didn't think it would work. I went along with him because I think I felt deep down that it wasn't right either - although I wished I'd had a better Christmas. It would have been worse if we'd soldiered on for a few more vital weeks.

What was the conception you junked?

Roger Michell is one of the best directors I've ever worked with and we spark one another off, but **Milk Wood** was a really difficult project. Because it was originally a radio play we couldn't seem to find a language for it - a world. We had to abstract it. And it was going into the Olivier which is a difficult space. It's one of the hardest things I've ever designed. What we came up with in the end we had discussed on day two. We'd gone all

the way round the piss pot to find the handle.

Without mentioning names, what is your experience of a bad director?

If a director has no engagement with the piece and is only doing it because s/he was asked to, you can always tell straight away. Everyone is at sea and miserable. That's happened to me a few times. No set can ever save the show. They can bolster them up a few notches, but if the director doesn't know what s/he is doing, there's nothing much you can do except have a horrible time.

How would you define good stage design?

Easy ones first eh! I'll tell you what it isn't. Actors are told at drama school that good stage design is something that you don't notice. If I'd ever have thought that, I wouldn't have become a designer. In fact I do think actors should have stage design built into their course because it might stop them coming out with the 'blue kills comedy, green is unlucky' stuff. They subconsciously seem to have ingested the idea that set, props and costumes are a series of hurdles that get between them and the audience. One of the differences between theatre design and design for film or television, is its tangible presence. Three-dimensional objects have a significance for an audience in the theatre. I'm not saying a set can't be obtrusive - it can actually vibrate against the retina too much and detract from the actor's face for example, or it can be too noisy and cumbersome. Stage design is a victim of fashion, like everything else, and so you can't say that only one aesthetic is the right one. I think good design is an elegant evocation of the author's intention. It captures the essence of the piece and deals in essentials. That doesn't mean everything has to be the well placed chair and a cup - I've seen some wonderfully cluttered

sets that suited the piece such as Julia Trevelyan Oman's **Brief Lives.** That's very unfashionable currently and I know I'm courting bad reviews with **Wild Oats** that I'm working on at the moment, because I'm deliberately putting in piles of stuff. I'm not saying that I can reproduce any style to order. I would have problems with a box set for example.

Can you expand on this idea of the tangible presence of objects on stage? Is it because they can have a metaphorical significance?

When a symbolic language is appropriate, I do consciously look for the right metaphor. An object with all its physical quality and implications, present on stage can have far more authority than the same object on film, because the focus changes or it may be out of shot. Having recently done my first film (**Persuasion**. BBC), that difference fascinated me. An example would be something like a weapon on stage, or any instrument of cruelty - a gallows, a guillotine - to be crude. All those camp glitzy fabrics like fur, silk and velvet have tremendous power on stage because they can smoulder in half light. It's a myth that the camera is an eye - the human eye is far more sophisticated in that it can take in depth and perspective and width much more efficiently than the camera can. It can take in one thing while focusing on another. I just don't believe the maxim that an audience should never look at anything other than the actor's face - particularly a young audience because they are so much more visually educated than older people. They are used to extracting information from visual stimuli very quickly.

Did you feel you were able to explore these ideas in your site-specific work in Glasgow - <u>The Ship</u> and <u>The Big Picnic</u>?

For me, it goes back to the late sixties. A series of productions came to the Round House that blew me away. There was **1789**, then **The Grand Magic Circus** from Paris and the **La Mama** stuff. What excited me was actors and audience sharing a physical space the way you could at the Round House. The actors may have been better lit, but never the less there was a feeling of them mixing with a sea of bodies. Instinctively I felt this was the way that theatre had to go. There wasn't much I could do about it in the short-term except for a couple of in-the-round shows in the Theatre Upstairs, but in the late seventies, working with Peter Gill at the Riverside and then with Bill Bryden at the Cottesloe, we started doing some promenade shows. I made the major discovery that the interaction within Shakespeare's playhouse was much more strongly linked to the Miracle Plays than I had thought. Having been involved with the reconstruction of the Globe - and people like Declan Donnolan agree with me - I'm convinced that the action didn't all happen on the stage. I'm sure that there was a strong congregational element in that this mass body of citizenry participated in the event and it united different generations, class and race. You can see it to some extent at football matches but it's very gender-biased there. At moments, **The Ship** achieved that sort of communion. The climax of the show was when the audience who had occupied this structure which was built to resemble the ribs of a ship and could accommodate a thousand - came out onto the ground below and the whole ship slid down the slipway. Because the piece was a lament for the end of the shipyards, it was a very moving moment. The band was playing and the shout that went up was something you only ever hear at Wembley. No one could believe that something so Leviathan could move. I don't think since Joan Littlewood anyone has got in such a genuine local audience. All the audience I talked to afterwards said they'd never forget it.

Was it some of the most rewarding work you've done?

It was wonderful being able to work on that scale. Of course it had some flaws because we were developing our technique. The smaller-scale scenes suffered. I'm hoping to solve those particular problems when I do a new production of **Les Misèrables** in a similar shed in Helsinki. In discussions with Cameron Mackintosh about it, we've agreed that it has a huge potential as a form. It owes a lot to the rock concert in its scale, but it needs to be elastic enough in its form to contain the more intimate scenes. It might convert the kind of young guy who said to me the other day, ' Oh theatre - yeah - that's a locked off camera'.

So what is the solution for intimate scenes?

I'm not sure at the moment but I have faith that we will find a way. There are so many technophobes about who are afraid to develop and adapt techniques used in other, let's say, leisure activities - theme parks, rock concerts and so on. In **The Big Picnic** we were able to use something like a tracking shot in a movie. The audience walks with a platoon towards the trenches and there's a seated block of three hundred people who silently glide along with them. It's a physical statement of the thoughts that go with them. I'm not a techno nut - I'm happy to work on a small scale with delicate materials, but I see as part of my professional armoury the ability to allow technology to serve a piece when appropriate. I feel there is no aesthetic competition between some beautifully crafted hydraulics or an exquisitely cut piece of velvet. It's horses for courses.

Do you feel being an associate designer at the RNT has constrained your aesthetic in any way?

No. Nowadays it's just an honorary title. We used to meet as a group to back up Richard (Eyre) and be a voice for in-house decisions. I've done a lot of shows here and I hope

(Eyre) and be a voice for in-house decisions. I've done a lot of shows here and I hope they've all been in different styles - styles that suit the piece.

Does it concern you that the audience may not be understanding things the way you intended them to?

Yes it does. It staggers me sometimes, the assumptions people make. I did a production of **Heartbreak House** with Trevor Nunn a couple of years ago which had a backcloth representing the South Downs, overlooking the Channel - and the number of people who asked me why I had put the play underwater was astounding. I could *not* see how they saw that, but enough people read it in that way to worry Trevor, so at the end of the preview week I repainted it.

Would you accept that your study and practice in fine art might make your frame of reference inaccessible to the majority of the audience?

No. It's not an Art History quiz. What I hope is that whether you see my personal hand painting or a classic piece of imagery, the reference to a particular painter or architect is evocative of the dramatic point of the scene and somehow channels the energy of the actors to the audience. It's not join up the dots and you'll find it's the Mona Lisa. I'll use a particular image if I think it's spectacularly relevant or as a kind of mood statement but there aren't points to be scored for right answers. I remember doing Brecht's **Schweyk in the Second World War** (Olivier 1982, director Richard Eyre) with giant, thirty foot cut-out figures of the world leaders. I took as a period reference the wonderful cartoons by Sir David Lowe who was the Evening Standard cartoonist throughout the war. Although they were photographically accurate, only one critic got it right. They almost unanimously

described them as Grosz's cartoons - it was just a lazy association game. If it's Brecht, then it must be Grosz. You can't write a letter to correct them because then you'd be accused of being pretentious and obscure. So they never learn. There's no right of reply to the brickbats. For example, a critic suggested the other day that I had plagiarised some ideas from **Wind in the Willows** for my design of **Under Milk Wood** - it was in connection with the drum revolve. With no prompting from me, an actor in the cast wrote to that critic pointing out that when I designed **The Shaughraun** I had actually been the first person to use the drum revolve. That's an example of a casual insult to which I had no redress.

Do you feel that generally critics fail to do justice to theatre design?

Along with most theatre designers, I feel that stage design deserves an appraisal more akin to film criticism. Perhaps we should invite a whole different string of critics to see, and I mean look at, our shows. Too often they just get things wrong.

Do you like to develop ideas that you've already explored?

It's quite an interesting exercise doing a show for the second time in a different way. I've done **Hamlet** three times and I'd be happy to do it again. There are so many possible interpretations. Technically it's interesting to develop how different materials interact with one another.

How do you find out about what new materials are available?

I used to go to a lot of graphics trade fairs to find new ways to make the marks. I don't always like the way I paint and draw, so about fifteen years ago I bought a graphic camera

which is like a photographic version of a copier, and I did collage techniques with that. Now I do a lot on a Macintosh computer. You can draw freely on it and then apply graphic effects. It's re-personalising rather than de-personalising because you can render the image plastic and malleable and bring the whole thing out as a colour print. Extraordinarily, I can't interest any of my colleagues in my methods. They want to stick with the pencil. It's a pity because you can play with ideas so freely using something like a Macintosh. In fact, later this year I'm doing **Rat in the Skull** with Stephen Daldry where the imagery is directly driven by computer.

Would you say you are more influenced by developments in computer graphics and technology generally than by painting or sculpture?

No. The other way round. I actually think I almost know too much about art history. If I'm doing a play set in a particular period, I need to get inside the skin of that period, and I'm absorbed by the idea of not judging a period by today's mores and aesthetics. Otherwise it's superficial. I want to know how a character would have taken a leak and whether or not he would have seen someone executed - and then radiate out from that detail to see what it is the playwright is taking from that period. One of the pleasures of this job for me is the first delirious weeks of researching it. I'd like a Doctor Who Tardis. My time machine this year encompassed Paris in the 1870s doing Donizetti's **Lucia di Lammermoor** at the Bastille opera, then South Wales in the 1930s for **Under Milk Wood** and now my head is somewhere along the Portsmouth road in the 1780s.

What's the next stage in your working method after you've done the period research?

For the **Merry Wives of Windsor** I did with Bill Alexander in 1985, I did some in-depth research about Elizabethan England and then Bill, who'd been away, said how nice but he wasn't setting it in Elizabethan England, it was going to be in the 1950s. And it was a big hit. I think that it was because Bill knew exactly *why* he wanted it set then - he felt it was Shakespeare's only play about the middle class and the post-war period of regrowth was directly comparable to the optimism after the Armada.

How do you cope with Shakespeare plays that aren't set in his own time, or even place - the Roman plays, for example?

It makes you want to know where he was coming from, what informed him, what was his attitude to women? I don't think you should ever do any designing in a vacuum. You need to draw on a lot of information before you pare it down and if you change the period it has to be properly relevant. For example, I did a **Hamlet** in Hamburg that was set in the cold war period in order to point up the fear of invasion that the Elizabethans were experiencing and that worked really well.

Do you find that opera directors are more prepared to take visual risks than theatre directors?

Not necessarily. I find that opera, for the most part, is less serious than theatre. It handles softer options. It seems a sort of divertissement to me. It's so reverential. As you probably gather I'm rather disillusioned about opera. There's been such a development in attitude from directors, actors and designers over the last twenty-odd years, but the musical establishment still seems to be stuck and the audience for it seems to be so predictable.

Is this anything to do with your unfortunate experiences with The Ring?

Well, that was a wall-to-wall nightmare. For three years. We're sitting on the very spot that Peter Hall asked me the ultimate - 'Would I like to design **The Ring** at Bayreuth?' We were about ten years ahead of our time. It was a Green production about pollution and it was a strong reaction against what Peter described as Gucci Marxism and of course we were hammered for it not being Marxist enough. On a personal level it destroyed my confidence. I've never been quite the same since, although luckily I did two well received shows at the RSC straight afterwards. But I've definitely got a block about opera, although I've done a few since.

Do you use a lot of assistants?

No. I find that a theatre designer's fee isn't large enough to pay for assistants. It's terrible really because I get a job application about once a fortnight. It's an impossible situation because what they are saying is 'Pay me while you educate me'. There should be an apprenticeship system linked into an education budget. To be the main assistant on a big show is a major job and in the last twenty years I have only used about four or five - and they tend to be the same people. It's not that I get impatient, it's because my organisational skills aren't that good - I tend to make decisions as I go along - and I don't want to be a workshop manager, looking over people's shoulders all the time, getting nothing done myself.

What do you feel about theatre designers' training?

I studied painting at St. Martins and then did a post-grad. course in stage design at the Slade. But now, the sheer numbers of courses proliferating round the country is worrying.

I don't know what's going to happen to them all. Some of them go into video promos and other advertising I suppose. It makes you feel lucky to be getting so much work, but at the same time, concerned and vulnerable. There's a lot of good people around and not much work.

How do you feel about the future?

Very insecure. There's a sea of talent out there waiting to engulf me. You're only as good as your last two shows. When I did that second disastrous **Merry Wives**, the 'phone didn't ring for a year. For most of '93 I was developing a scheme for the Bankside power station site. Actually I got really interested in it. It was an odd feeling though - twenty years working, one bummer and that's it. Now I'm going to be a father, I'm questioning the life of a designer as an eternal art student. Unless you crack a West End musical there's very little money in it. What I do feel optimistic about is theatre in alternative spaces. The western world is full of enormous defunct industrial buildings and often the local authorities can't afford to pull them down. Arts groups take them over and things happen - caf■s, bars and so on. This could be the way forward with interesting site-specific work. I'm convinced the audience is there. A lot of people don't agree with me and say 'That's not theatre - give me three bare boards and a passion' - as if there is only one way to paint a picture.

NETTIE EDWARDS

WORK	COMPANY/VENUE	DIRECTOR
1983/4		
Designer for **Drama Studio Season** at Notting Hill Gate		
1985		
Nice Loud Voice	Duke's Theatre, Lancaster	Ian Yeoman
Sleeping Beauty*	Duke's Theatre	Jonathan Petherbridge
The Winter's Tale	Duke's Theatre	Petherbridge
Jude the Obscure	Duke's Theatre	Petherbridge
The Play of Jennet*	Duke's Theatre	Ian Forrest
The Changeling*	Duke's Theatre	Petherbridge
(* costumes only)		
1986		
The Good Person of Setzuan	Theatre Foundry/tour	Romy Robinson
Raisin in the Sun	Contact Theatre, Manchester	Whylie Longmore
Blood Wedding	Contact Theatre	Anthony Clark
Dreams with Teeth	Contact Theatre	Sheryl Crown
Antony and Cleopatra	Contact Theatre	Clark
Playboy of the West Indies	Contact Theatre	Brigid Larmour
1987		
Holly and the Magical Oak	Gardner Centre, Brighton	Stephen Daldry
1988		
The Lucky Chance	Theatre Royal, York	Martin Houghton
The Three Sisters	Everyman, Liverpool	Kevin Robinson
1989-1992		
Macbeth	Theatre Royal, Cheltenham	Martin Houghton
A Doll's House	Theatre Royal	Houghton
Lady Macbeth	Theatre Royal	Houghton
The Cherry Orchard	Theatre Royal	Houghton
The Pickwick Papers	Theatre Royal	Houghton
Design for Living	Theatre Royal	Forrest
Death Trap	Theatre Royal	Houghton
The Mayor of Casterbridge	Theatre Royal	Houghton
A Little Hotel on the Side	Theatre Royal	Houghton
The Provok'd Wife	Theatre Royal	Houghton
A View from the Bridge	Theatre Royal	Houghton

Gaslight	Theatre Royal	Houghton
The Importance of Being Earnest	Theatre Royal	Houghton

1993

Henry V	RNT (Education Dept.)	Larmour
Torch Song Trilogy	The Gateway, Chester	Sue Wilson
Jane Eyre	Theatre Royal	Houghton
Amadeus	Theatre Royal	Houghton
All My Sons	Theatre Royal	Houghton

1994

Awake and Sing	The Birmingham Repertory Theatre	Bill Alexander
The Jungle Book	Theatre Royal	Sheila Mander
Annie	Theatre Royal	Houghton
Death and the Maiden	Theatre Royal	Houghton
The Sound of Music	Theatre Royal	Houghton

1995

Not a Game for the Boys	Royal Court	Richard Georgeson
The Tempest	RNT (Education Dept.)	Larmour

1996

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes	The Birmingham Repertory Theatre	Anthony Clark
The Entertainer	The Birmingham Repertory Theatre/ West Yorkshire Playhouse	Clark

INTERVIEW WITH NETTIE EDWARDS - 2 FEBRUARY 1995

Can you define your working relationship with a director?

It's very much a question of finding a shared visual vocabulary. This isn't just a matter of reference points, it's to do with finding common ground between the language of a visual artist and the language of an academic. It's surprising just how many directors come from an academic background. This isn't to say that academics can't have a developed visual sense or that designers can't analyse text, but there are processes a visual artist will go through that doesn't involve language. Sometimes, as a designer, you need to wipe out language. I certainly do, because I'm always trying to find the emotional centre to the piece. Paradoxically, it's how an actor works - going beyond the words to an underlying truth. If a designer works on a linguistic level, s/he'll probably start falling into the trap of cliché and crass statement. You have to go along the lines of what *feels* right. That happens on a number of levels. For example there's the level that has a lot to do with colour composition. Despite the plethora of colour theory, in the end it has to be the designer's individual response to particular colours. But to return to the relationship with a director. It has to do with trust and bravery. You can't be afraid, either of you, of what 'people will think' of a production. Given that a director takes ultimate responsibility for a production, it takes bravery for him or her to delegate and admit an equal input from a designer and not to override design decisions if the designer really believes in them. The most rewarding partnership is when it is just that - a partnership and there is open debate. Unfortunately, not a lot of directors work in that way.

Is it the process that is to blame here, do you think? The fact that designs have to be drawn up for costing and so on even before rehearsals have begun?

Yes, but there is a sense in which a designer has inevitably explored the play in more detail, earlier on than has the director. In order to conceptualize the piece, s/he will have had to have mentally choreographed it in the space. Most directors don't work that way. Certainly, working practices don't allow designers to engage with the organic working process, although most of us would like to. There's no doubt that as a method it causes a lot of pressure for production staff and it's very expensive - the waste and the overtime incurred.

I gather you like to work closely with a lighting designer?

I design for light. There's a big gap in my work that is the lighting. The models on their own don't tell the whole story - I enjoy working with lighting designers who bring their own creativity to the work. It's very stimulating. I'm very excited by integration - by, for example, a swoop of light being an element of the design. These things can be very difficult to impress upon a production team during a model showing and so it can be difficult to carry them along.

It's always interesting to talk about process and practice. Do you always follow the same pattern?

I do a lot of scribbles and sketches and then I try to work in 3D as soon as I can - even if it's on a very small scale. I like to keep it loose. Alongside that I'll be working on a drawing board. And we mustn't forget the mechanical tasks like making a costume and location breakdown. That's after negotiating with the director about where the piece is to be set. My work tends generally to ignore any description of the set or stage directions and to be about emotional space rather than geographical space, so this can involve a lot of discussion.

It sounds as if you dislike working naturalistically?

No. I do like working literally - sometimes. And I think I'm quite good at it because I'm a stickler for detail. I think that if it's done authentically, it can still be witty. I can't bear to see it done badly and rather than compromise when you've got a small budget, I'd like to find another way of doing it.

As with your Cherry Orchard and the giant bookcase which was a sort of giant crazy-naïve painting on the back flat, wasn't it?

Yes. That gave rise to a fair amount of discussion.

How do you feel about the audience reaction to your work as, 'Very Nettie Edwards'?

As long as I'm proud of the work I don't mind. I enjoy other artists' work that is courageous and extreme, so I suppose I try to emulate that. Take someone like Howard Hodgkin, who I admire a lot. Whatever his subject - and they are very varied - you can tell it's his brushstroke. Why shouldn't that apply to scenographic artists? You have to keep moving forward and trying new ideas, but it may be that some images or cut of cloth or whatever, should be used again. And are! One of the things that confines design is the use of materials. That can be dictated by budget, availability, or what your workshop is prepared to work with. A designer is an artist with her hands tied behind her back. You have the ideas which you can realize in model or sketch form, but in the end you are at the mercy of whoever builds, assembles and paints - makes concrete - your work. And skills vary enormously in this area.

Do you welcome feedback from performers?

I love working with actors. If I could, I'd be in the rehearsal room all the time. I really enjoy it when an actor tells me that I've provided another dimension to their characterization - opened another door for them. You have to quite genuinely let them feel that you are open to what they have to say. You also have to be on your guard, because they can't see the whole picture. You are seeing the piece as a walking, talking, three-dimensional picture and an actor isn't thinking like that. I'm more interested in a non-literal approach. A character may profess in the text to *be* a certain thing but they don't *look* like that thing at all. The tension set up by that contradiction can be challenging for an audience. People don't necessarily look the way they are and the way

they perceive themselves is often not the way others see them. I don't think the design should be simply telling the story. Supporting, yes, or offering up, but not underlining. Sometimes you're doing the fittings before an actor has even gone into rehearsal - which is horrible - but occasionally s/he'll immediately respond to it physically - play with it - which is lovely to watch and often very funny. But it is a real act of faith isn't it, for an actor on day one of rehearsals to be told 'This is the set and these are the costumes'? Yes, there are clashes occasionally and I think you have to be brave enough to say, 'Look, you're a trained actor, I'm a trained designer and I'm the one looking at it.' And often they don't have much knowledge of lighting. They see themselves under the dressing room lights and imagine that's how they are appearing on stage.

What feelings do you, as a designer, have about the way critics review theatre?

I would go so far as to say that critics are responsible for holding back the development of theatre because they persist in regarding theatre as literature. Secondly, an art exhibition can have a half-page spread where the theatre review - even if it's the National - will have half a column. And if you're in the regions, you have even less cover of course. It says a lot about the status of the work.

What about audience reaction? Do you want your work to be read and understood in a particular way?

I do get concerned when a member of an audience, if s/he sees something s/he wasn't

expecting, feels threatened. Rather than saying, 'I'm not sure about that, can you talk to me about it?' - they shut off. My big question is, 'When did theatre cease to be an arena for provocative debate?' It seems that the majority - particularly where I've been for the last few years (Cheltenham) - simply want to be massaged - their late twentieth-century egos gently stroked. I like to think that there are a few people like me who like to be entertained by being provoked and outraged. I like to think that people have several different interpretations of what I have done and might disagree and might enjoy disagreeing. Also, I've noticed at various talkbacks that individuals will latch onto certain things that they have seen that I wasn't entirely conscious of having done. It had been thought about way, way back in the creative process, stored and then out it tumbled without my realizing it, in the final stages. I don't think you should ever patronise an audience. You should offer it up and allow everyone his or her own interpretation. In that way it's a democratic process. I do have intentions but that's only half of it.

An example, I suppose, would be your Macbeth, wouldn't it? I seem to remember there was some debate as to whether the huge painted flat was a literal representation of a vagina or not.

Yes, that's a good example because I intended it to embrace both sexuality and violence, so it could be seen as a vagina or as others saw it - a wound. And of course you have to allow for the fact that people will always interpret abstract images sexually. Perhaps it's odd, but I do get annoyed when people, particularly critics, confuse the practical and the artistic. We did a whole season on a raked stage once, simply because it vastly improved

the sight lines - Victorian proscenium arch theatres would originally have had a slight rake anyway. There was a huge reaction to this. 'What did it mean?' It meant that more people could see.

Apart from Macbeth, you've done A Winter's Tale as a promenade at Lancaster. Do you approach a Shakespeare in a particular way?

I'm a bit provocative about this. I go about designing a Shakespeare play just like any other. It's so rich and so strong that it can take any number of interpretations. It has to be my personal, emotional response - which is not the way all directors want to work.

So you don't feel intimidated by either the knowledge that the plays were written for an almost empty stage - anti-design in a way - or by the complexity of imagery in the text?

Not really. I don't think I should be telling the story. I like to be producing what I'd call emotional spaces. I don't see why there has to be a reality. A lot of people could only deal with that **Macbeth** by seeing it as a landscape. But it wasn't. So I decided to deal with this by slicing it up with a diagonal line. And still people - the carpenter for example - said, 'What's that line doing across that landscape?' You can't possibly recreate the power of place in Shakespeare realistically. Rather than recreate even part of a castle, I prefer to make an abstract statement which suggests and which opens out the possibilities. I felt that when I was designing **The Cherry Orchard**. The whole of the first act is taken up

with the characters' memory of this cherry orchard, so, not only whose memory do you show, but how *much* do you show - if anything? Should it remain in the imagination of the audience? What I tried to find was an image that was nothing to do with reality, but when a spectator bled through to that reality in her imagination, she could feel the power and the awe that the place exercised through the characters' emotional memory. It was simply lit gauze - a curtain of light. There are problems of interpretation when you use an architectural idea to express emotional states. This happened with **Jane Eyre** for example, where I used a staircase stripped of any detail. It was never supposed to be *the* staircase in Rochester's house, it was about Jane's struggle and her fears and there were things about the door at the top, but I was aware that there would always be people seeing it as the front hall.

Do you think that the reason a spectator might agonise about what the visual images 'mean' rather than responding, as you would say, emotionally, is that s/he is trying to connect what is seen too literally to the text?

Definitely. And there seems to be an odd sanitization process. In advertising, to a huge extent, products are sold using sexual imagery, but this is rare in theatre design. I think we should appeal to sexuality more.

Can you identify specific sources in your work?

Most designers are magpies, I think. I read the piece. The first time I rarely understand it,

but I'll have an initial response. As Georgia O'Keefe said, 'You have to really know a flower to be able to paint it' - it's the same with design. You have to keep reading that play. It has to get inside you. And then you find that you are looking at everything in the light of that play. Even something on the tele might suddenly become relevant - or shapes around you. Then you might start looking through books, but it might be something like a gesture or the drape of material that strikes a chord - or found imagery such as the way rubbish falls out of a dustbin. I do sometimes make direct reference to painting. In **Macbeth** I used a direct visual quote - a torn banner. It was the symbol of a cross. This worried some of the audience who didn't recognise the reference. They thought that I hadn't had time to finish the cloth. I prefer rough gestures to perfectly rounded edges. It gives off energy.

Have you found working in a proscenium arch space confining?

Before I came to the Cheltenham Everyman, I hadn't worked in many proscenium arch theatres. This was rather frightening at first, but then I began to enjoy the scale of it. The main frustration is wanting constantly to bring things out into the audience but the sight lines don't allow it. You can bring the image out, as in **Death and the Maiden**, but the actors can't be seen! I'd love to do site-specific work - in something like an old warehouse you can strip away the inhibiting respectability and formality that some theatre buildings engender. There can be more sense of danger. But then you can work against the Victorian plush and it can be excitingly shocking when you do subvert the space. For example, when I did Coward's **Design for Living**, I was well aware of the reaction I was

going to get, because I wanted the artist's studio to reflect his rebellious character. There was paint spilt and splashed all over the place - all over their nice little theatre. Conversely you can celebrate the theatricality of the space - which we did with **Pickwick Papers**.

Do you worry that an audience might not share your visual frame of reference?

I don't think you can let it concern you too much although it is apparent sometimes - often in a quite banal way. For example, when we did **The Importance of Being Earnest**, the fashion for yuppies in the city was smart shorts and jackets, so I put Algernon in shorts. One of the national critics said that he couldn't understand why the character was wearing shorts. He simply hadn't got the reference.

But advertisers have to be sure that they are hitting the right target visually, don't they? They have to get a particular message across.

Often they do that by reference to the arts. They steal ideas, aural, visual and literary, and if the artists hadn't been given the space to develop those ideas, the commercial sector would be more impoverished than it is. Theatre shouldn't be formulaic and it shouldn't be about manipulation - it should be about opening out meanings democratically.

So the reception process is like, say, reading a poem, where meaning is in a sense locked up and everyone, according to what cultural baggage they carry, is allowed

to extract any meaning that they can relate to and understand?

Exactly.

DAVID FIELDING

WORK (since)	COMPANY/VENUE	DIRECTOR
1984		
Mazeppa	ENO, London	David Alden
1985		
Xerxes	ENO	Nic Hytner
1986		
The Flying Dutchman	ROH, London	Robert Ashman
1987		
Idomeneo	Vienna State Opera	Schaat
Simon Boccanegra	ENO	Alden
Jules César	Paris Garnier	Hytner
1988		
Elisa e Claudio	Wexford Festival	**David Fielding**
Wozzeck	Los Angeles Opera	Alden
The Tempest	RSC, RST	Hytner
The Plain Dealer	RSC, Swan Theatre	Ron Daniels
Restoration	RSC, Swan Theatre	Roger Michell
1989		
Street Scene	ENO/Scottish Opera	David Pountney
A Masked Ball	ENO/Netherlands	Alden
1990		
Clarissa	ENO	Pountney
Britannicus	Crucible Theatre, Sheffield	**Fielding**
Scenes From An Execution	Almeida Theatre, London	Ian McDiarmid
1991		
King Lear	RSC, RST	Hytner
La Clemenza di Tito	Glyndebourne	Hytner
The Intelligence Park	Almeida Festival	**Fielding**
Elizabeth II	Gate Theatre, London	**Fielding**
	Pet Shop Boys - World Tour	
1992		
Don Carlos	ENO	Pountney
The Hypochondriacs	Citizens Theatre, Glasgow	**Fielding**
Elektra	WNO	Alden

My Fair Lady	Manchester Royal (costumes - Jasper Conran)	Simon Callow
1993		
Soundbites	ENO, Contemporary Studio	**Fielding**
1994		
Capriccio	Garsington Opera	**Fielding**
Xerxes	ENO/Flanders/Chicago	Hytner

DESIGNER'S NAME CHANGED TO **PAUL BOND**
(DAVID FIELDING IS NOW THE DIRECTOR/DESIGNER)

1995		
Betrayal	Citizens Theatre	**Fielding**
Die Schauspieldirektor	Garsington Opera	**Fielding**
Daphne	Garsington Opera	**Fielding**
The Park	RSC, The Pit	**Fielding**
Mother Courage	RNT, Olivier	Jonanthan Kent
1996		
Idomeneo	Garsington Opera	**Fielding**
Tannhäuser	Opera North	**Fielding**
1997		
Egypt and Helen	Garsington Opera	**Fielding**
Eve of Retirement	The Gate Theatre	**Fielding**

INTERVIEW WITH DAVID FIELDING - 8 APRIL 1995

I usually ask the 'What would you like to do next?' question last, but in your case it needs to be addressed earlier because you have notably moved on from being a designer to becoming a director/designer. How and why did this happen?

I've always been interested in the whole process of putting shows on - not just designing them. Even at primary school I would write pieces that I wanted to stage and now, if I felt I had something I wanted to say, I would love to write, direct and design a piece. Perhaps not star in it as well!

So what made you specialize in design?

I think it was because I found it easy to draw, to use colour, to create in an artistic/painterly fashion. It was following the line of least resistance I suppose. I've always felt that for me, it's been an easy option and now I want to test myself to see what else I can do. There's a perverseness in me that requires me to create problems in order to solve them. Quite honestly I was bored with being a theatre designer only a few years after having become one. I like the business of coming up with the ideas, I quite like making the model - although I'd rather watch someone else build it for me, and I'm bored to tears with the process of getting it on. The haggling about money and resources, persuading people to build it or paint it the way you want it to be, getting it on stage - the whole battle. It just doesn't do anything for me.

What about when you see it actually animated and inhabited - when you see it work?

Frustration - that's what I experience usually. If it's not me directing it I can't help feeling that it's not what I would have done with the piece. I find I'm asking all sorts of questions - to myself of course - as to why certain decisions were taken.

Do you agree with the theory that to design a piece you've already directed it in your head anyway?

I don't think that's entirely true. You've got to have a really clear understanding of the dynamic of the space. That is something that has to be learnt. You can be taught that or intuitively assimilate it, without necessarily knowing how to direct in the space. On the other hand, it's just a short step then to actually doing the work with the actors. A director has to be a cross between a diplomat and a psychologist really, and that isn't necessarily what being a designer involves, although it can do when it comes to negotiating about money or forcing an idea through or cajoling people into painting or sculpting something the way you want it.

Can you be specific about your frustration with the way a piece has been directed within a set you have provided?

If a set is mobile - if it moves - either on trucks or a revolve - and the space around the moving parts has been ignored, with the actors continually gravitating downstage, then the physical realisation of the production is not being used properly. It can happen with a box set as well. The performers haven't been directed to use the whole of the space, including the extremities.

Doesn't that imply that there hasn't been proper communication between director and designer from the outset?

That type of discussion seldom takes place. It's difficult to initiate. When directors open up a discussion about a project, they don't talk about it in terms of staging, they talk about the background to the piece and ideologies and vague visual concepts that they hope you will somehow scoop up and rationalize for them. When you produce the box for them and they say 'great', you assume that they are going to explore the full potential of the defined space. It's only at the final stages that you realize that perhaps they haven't. It really depends on the balance of power as to whether you are expected to contribute any ideas on staging or not. Of course, some directors do take full advantage of what has been provided. David Alden, particularly, understands about using a large acting arena to its full extent - about choreographing, to an extent. I've found that singers are more prepared to be choreographed than actors - particularly British actors who tend to have very fixed ideas about where they should be to deliver their lines - for example, the need to be fully lit rather than performing in shadow. If an actor confronts a British director, he will usually back down and by doing so will dilute the whole aesthetic process. This is probably because a lot of British directors are still coming from a literary tradition where the written text takes precedence over the theatrical concept and because they may have a limited or undeveloped visual sense, they depend on the designer to provide a visual support to the text. This leads to the question of what is good and bad design. I think that a good designer is someone who has an inner strength that will allow simplicity. Although I can see it has an attraction I find it difficult to admire the realism school - the box set full of perfect replica period *objets*. There's also a style that falls in between contemporary abstract and cluttered realism which is where a lot of British designers trap themselves - cluttering up the stage with a confusion of fussy detail and sadly, directors

aren't able to point out what is happening because they too are visually cluttered themselves. If a director and designer could acknowledge that the emphasis should be on the figures, the performers, rather than ambient bits and pieces, the results would be better.

Can you give any examples of productions which fall into this design no-man's land?

I think you have to look at it historically. During the fifties, design generally had a fantasy quality about it. An Oliver Messel drawing room may have suggested a form of realism, but it was romanticized. Then through the sixties when Ralph (Koltai) was working, he brought into existence a starker, sparer style which was related to the materials available at that time, such as plastics and perspex and chrome - all that hooked into blacks and whites and silvers. It had a nod in the direction of the Bauhaus. Out of that developed a painterly style influenced by people like Axel Manthey and Freyer who as brilliant painters turned their hands to theatre design in Germany and reinvented painted scenery. Ralph wasn't exactly of that school, in that he didn't use paint like they did, he used raw materials.

Running along side, you still have the Oliver Messel painterly tradition. Coming out of this are people like John Bury and then John Gunter and, to a certain extent, Bill Dudley's work, which, though not painterly, I would describe as decorative. The other branch, the heavier sort of design is, say, Maria (Bjõrnson's). Her designs are almost Victorian in that they are very cluttered with detail and claustrophobic - over-designed I would say. Even John Bury, who is much sparer, has been described as elephantine Beatrix Potter. The set can look like a blown up doll's house. Now someone like Philip Prowse, although he only uses black and white - occasionally a bit of gold or a streak of red - his understanding of

space and proportion is exemplary. Then you get someone like Tim O'Brien who is almost as good on proportion as Philip, but not so theatrical and rough, and he adds a bit of Bob Crowley in that it is very glossy. It has a perfectionism about it that looks almost plastic. Richard Hudson inherits that rather shop window approach as well, I feel. There's a cleanliness that becomes sterility.

I think it's important to look back at one's early work in the context of what was happening generally, because firstly, in order to identify style you have to see it in the context of what the potentials of a medium offered at that time and secondly, whether your individual voice is important or whether you are subservient to the art form. Coming straight out of college, it's hard to find your own style.

Do you mean that in your early days a director might imply or even say 'I'd like you to do a Ralph Koltai on this - I've asked you because I can't afford him.'?

No, nothing quite as crude as that. I don't think many directors knew what they wanted at all! I think one felt that one had been chosen for what one could offer oneself and what one could express and for a long while I was under the impression that, out of what they told you, I could create something. That isn't necessarily the process.

So what should the process be?

A good director should know the work of a certain designer, for a start, and he would be using that designer with the understanding that what he produced would be relevant to the sort of paths he, the director, was interested in following. The director is buying a style, in a sense. What he would then expect is that designer would trap out that style to suit a particular piece. A director who doesn't have any idea about how a piece might look,

working with a new designer for the first time, is a terrifying prospect. Inexperienced designers can get inextricably lost. Luckily this can be avoided once you have some experience because there are short cuts and you have shorthand for what you know works and will be acceptable.

What you're implying is that you can pick a designer off the shelf, knowing exactly what you will get. Don't you acknowledge that designers change and develop their style? Indeed, you have - and look at Stefan Lazaridis, after his Aida with John Copley, he moved entirely away from being decorative.

As a student of Georgiardis whose style is very decorative, it was inevitable that he would start out the way he did - the complete opposite to Ralph's work really. He was picking up where Messel had left off and abstracting it. Then he completely changed to what he found interested him and challenged him. He became far less painterly and more high-tech.

Can you trace your influences and mutations?

My influences were definitely from the Continent. For the first three or four years of designing I had a sense of being lost, even having come out of a design school run by someone like Ralph. My work was competent but it didn't have any individuality about it. It was only when I met up with David Alden and I saw a lot of work in Germany and Eastern Europe and had publications sent over to me - immersed myself in it - that I felt I had clicked into something recognisable. I did about ten shows with David.

How or why did the partnership end?

There was a learning process in sharing an exploration of ideas with David. He was both collaborator and tutor. He's spent more time travelling round the world seeing shows than I had - particularly in Europe. However, once the initial excitement has settled down, you find yourself becoming repetitive and that what you are doing is servicing - you're an agency carrying out instructions.

Were you troubled by the unfavourable reaction to some of your work at ENO?

If you're referring to the work I did with David Alden - not really. I think that some of the audience were intimidated by such a clear cut aesthetic because they had been used to much softer edged work so that doesn't worry me. Far from it. I don't think there is anything wrong with being uncompromising. It surprises me that people can feel so threatened by suitcases, chairs and light bulbs. Perhaps they really are getting the reverberations that were intended!

It was after the partnership with David Alden that you decided to stop being a designer and become a director. In fact you went as far as changing your name.

My assumption was that people - and I mean people in the business, rather than the public, who aren't generally so interested in 'behind the scenes' - are very fixed in their perceptions of a practitioner's capabilities. After fifteen years of operating in one sphere I felt it was going to be hard persuading people that I could do something else with equal competence. It's been suggested to me that I did it the wrong way round - that I should have kept David Fielding as the designer and turned Paul Bond into the director.

Now that you combine the function of director/designer, don't you miss the discussion and crystallizing of ideas with another person?

Not really - the dialogue I might, ideally, have had with a director is with myself and it can go on day and night! Also I don't have to go as far as making a model to show, deciding it doesn't work and having to start again as it can all be in my head. I don't suffer from isolation because I can bring assistants in - but I prefer not to do that until I'm sure exactly where the project is going.

Do you rely a lot on assistants?

It creates problems if you do because technical staff don't like it. There can be a situation where I'm in rehearsal and the technical director or costume supervisor needs an important decision to be made and s/he is reluctant to ask an assistant because he may pass something that I will then, as the director, not be happy with. This happens in the conventional director/designer set-up, but to a lesser extent. As long as there is proper planning ahead of the production period, it should work smoothly. For example, before rehearsals start, you can have bought all the fabric for the costumes, sorted out wigs and shoes, so all that is left is the fitting.

I can see that method being appropriate for opera, but what about smaller shows with small casts where there might well be more room for organic development visually? Surely it can't all be worked out beforehand then?

Ironically, it has to be. I've found with the fringe shows I've directed on tiny budgets of £1,000 or so, it *has* to be worked out in advance because there is no leeway for change.

Scrounging is obviously a major part of the process so you do need a costume assistant who can go out and find things. Doing the show at the Gate (**Elizabeth II**) was difficult for that reason, because although I did a lot of costume drawings, we couldn't afford to make them and there wasn't a wardrobe. I've never directed and designed a big budget show so I can't really speak about that end of the market, but even when I've designed for, say, the RSC, there is no opportunity for experimentation. You're talking about the ideal situation - three months rehearsal with everyone being paid weekly and at the end of the second month you start getting the costumes together. It hardly happens here. Even Complicité, who tried to do that recently with **Out of a House** found that their designer, Tim Hatley, was being criticized by the production staff for not coming up quickly enough with the designs. That contradicts their whole ideology.

What about actor input? Do you encourage this?

Well, I'm reminded of an experience Maria had. She was working at Stratford and was asked not to design anything until she had seen the actors work and talked to them about what they wanted. When she finally said to them, 'What costume ideas do you have for this character?' the answers varied between 'Er... doublet and hose?' to 'I was hoping you were going to tell me.' An actor's imagination often doesn't function on a level of period or fantasy - although for a contemporary production with everyday clothes, it might well be different. And after all, a designer's job is to cohere the whole image, and that doesn't allow for someone wearing something purple because it's their favourite colour - or even because they think it might suit the character they're portraying.

Does it concern you that what you create, visually, may be misread - that your vocabulary and frame of reference is not one shared necessarily by an audience?

I've given up worrying about that since I realized that even critics, let alone the general public, sometimes can't tell the difference between metal and wood or silver and gold. I have thought about it in the past. If I design something to suggest one thing and an audience sees it as something else, is this a problem? And I think the answer has to be no. Take painting as a parallel - there is no way that I will see, looking at a Howard Hodgkin, what he was seeing when he painted it.

Yes, but stage design isn't abstract painting and I know Hodgkin gives his work detailed titles - but surely design is linked to the whole performance text. It may not be exactly the same narrative, but surely it is connected to it....

Let's look at choice of colour. Do you remember **Simon Boccanegra**? It was a white tilted floor, half a circle surrounded by a half circular wall. The floor was white and the floor and ceiling were bright red. Why red? It was meant to be located in the twelfth century in the port of Genoa. With that brief, what images are evoked? What can the emotional response be? My intention was for the red to conjure up an imperial quality and the former glories of Rome. Why, one might argue, wasn't it purple? And did any one in the audience realize what the red was meant to signify? Did they all think it was the inside of a giant post-box? I've no idea.

Do you ever ask?

No. And no one ever seems to ask me. Not even when I did **Lear** for the RSC and I had a huge steel cube that revolved on stage. No one asked me what it was supposed to be.

And what was it supposed to be?

It was an expression of power - of the walled seat of power - an armoured fortress. Incidentally that was a classic example of the space not being used properly. The cube was meant to sit within a space with everything happening around it. The cube itself expressed the turmoil and anxiety at the centre of that society. It could have been a really interesting idea if it had been developed. I feel that if Nic (Hytner) had engaged me in a dialogue we could have made an interesting journey with it, but he cut off. He said it was fine and he could do the show with it, but whether he saw it as I intended, I really haven't the faintest idea.

That seems extraordinary to me.

Well, by that time I was bored. I'd thought it all through and if the director doesn't want to explore or exchange any ideas with me I can't be bothered. I don't feel it's my job to educate directors.

Do you think there are particular problems associated with designing Shakespeare? I'm referring to the richness of the imagery in the language perhaps 'getting in the way' for a designer.

I've only done three. A **Hamlet** years ago in York, and **The Tempest** and **Lear** at the RSC. I'd like to do **A Winter's Tale** and some of the later plays - particularly to direct them - but I'm not really interested in the early comedies. I think they're done too much. In answer to the question about the language, I find the complexity a benefit. Juxtaposition is stimulating. I enjoy putting contemporary design in Victorian theatres for example - so to make Shakespeare's text accessible I like the idea of modernizing it; I don't mean the over-specific and probably banal sort of 'let's set it in an Oxford College'

idea but it's possible to find a way which both acknowledges its time and speaks to ours. It's a question of finding the right metaphor.

The main problem I encountered designing Shakespeare was the theatre space - the RSC main stage - not the text. It's really problematic in that the theatre is built like a cinema and the spatial relationship between performers and audience isn't good. The stage is surprisingly small with very limited wing space. Added to that, you've got the complication of a repertoire. It's not that it's a proscenium arch, I like that, and I wouldn't want to work in the Swan again. In fact I'd go so far as to say that I *don't* like the Swan. I find it uncomfortable to sit in, I don't like looking down onto the top of actors' heads, I find the sightlines in terms of blocking a problem and I hate the finish of the wood - it reminds me of a vegetarian restaurant - Cranks probably - or a sauna. The theatre takes over and becomes the set.

What sort of space do you prefer working in then?

It depends. I like the solving of problems I suppose. I've just done Pinter's **Betrayal** in the studio at the Cits. (Glasgow Citizens Theatre) which is basically nine scenes set in six different locations, involving tables, chairs and beds. I enjoyed working that one out. My approach and aim, as always - even with opera on an epic scale - is spareness.

Would you like to do any site-specific work?

I've never done any, but I'd love to - in a quarry or on the river or something. Welfare State, all those sixties Happenings - they were great.

As I asked the last question first, let me do the reverse and ask you to describe your working process once you have agreed to design a project?

The first stage is reading around the subject. I look at background material - other texts connected to the one I'm working on as well as visual reference. Like a lot of designers I tend to photocopy these and have them around me. Before any 3D work I do lots of drawings. I try to rationalize on paper where the design is going before making the model, because during the model-making process it can often change radically. Depending on the size of the project, the model can take anything from ten days to three months. It can be expensive - obviously in terms of time - but also it involves loads of cardboard and bits and pieces and assistants helping and then the final making up into technical drawings - which I hate, so I usually try to get someone else to do it. It's quite a linear process.

Are you aware of repeating yourself stylistically?

I think that question's got to do with whether or not you recognise theatre designers as artists. I think it's a myth that you start with a *tabula rasa* for each production. An artist tends to return to certain ideas or obsessions. There are those who think of theatre design as an applied art rather than a fine art. The job is a bit of both actually, but the designers I admire most, I would classify as fine artists. So their statement is bound to say something about them as people. For those who see their job only as applied, then their work is often rather laboured. I like something bold and outrageous to happen on stage.

Whom do you admire?

I like what Nigel (Lowry) does a lot. His **Ring** is very painterly and very personal. It's not always totally disciplined in that you are aware of every idea being thrown in, rather than there having been much editing out - but it's terribly exciting and fresh with a beguiling na×vity. I feel the work should be part of you - express some part of you. You should create your own language, in a way. I think that although good design should take text into account, it should transcend it.

JOHN GUNTER

WORK (since)	COMPANY/VENUE	DIRECTOR
1980		
Born in The Garden	Globe Theatre	Clifford Williams
Heartbreak House	Malvern Festival Theatre	Williams
Rose	Duke of York, London	Alan Dossor
Juno and the Paycock	RSC, Aldwych Theatre	Trevor Nunn
We Come to The River (opera)	Nuremberg State Opera	Michael Hampe
Hamlet (opera)	Buxton Festival	Ronald Eyre
Beatrice and Benedict	Buxton Festival	Ronald Eyre
1981		
Devil's Disciple	Cort Theatre, New York	Williams
Cherry Orchard	Arts Council GB tour	Williams
All's Well That Ends Well	RSC, Stratford	Nunn
The Greek Passion	WNO	Michael Geliot
Macbeth	Opera North (costumes, Deirdre Clancy)	Geliot
1982		
Guys and Dolls	RNT, London	Richard Eyre
Plenty	Public Theater, New York	David Hare
Lear (opera)	Nuremberg State Opera	Hampe
Andrea Chénier	WNO	Geliot
1983		
The Rivals	RNT	Peter Wood
Lorenzaccio	RNT	Michael Rudman
Maydays	RSC, Barbican	Ron Daniels
The Turn of the Screw (opera)	Munich, Germany	Hampe
1984		
Wild Honey	RNT/L.A. (costumes, Deirdre Clancy)	Christopher Morahan
St. Joan	RNT	Ronald Eyre
1985		
The Government Inspector	RNT (costumes, Deirdre Clancy)	Richard Eyre
Albert Herring	Glyndebourne	Peter Hall

Faust	ENO, London (costumes, Deirdre Clancy)	Ian Judge
The Masked Ball	Australian Opera	John Cox
1986		
Mephisto	RSC, Stratford (costumes, Deirdre Clancy)	Adrian Noble
Made in Bangkok	Aldwych Theatre	Rudman
Wrecked Eggs	RNT	Hare
High Society	Leicester Haymarket	Richard Eyre
Simon Boccanegra	Glyndebourne	Hall
Porgy and Bess	Glyndebourne	Nunn
Die Meistersinger	Maggio Musicale, Florence	Hampe
1987		
High Society	Victoria Palace Theatre	Richard Eyre
La Traviata	Glyndebourne	Hall
Fidelio	San Francisco Opera	Hampe
Faust	Opera North (costumes, Deirdre Clancy)	Judge
1988		
The Flying Dutchman	La Scala, Milan	Hampe
Falstaff	Glyndebourne	Hall
Die Meistersinger	Australian Opera	Hampe
1989		
Hamlet	RNT	Richard Eyre
Jeffrey Barnard is Unwell	GB tour	Ned Sherrin
The Sect Rapture	RNT	Peter Gill
Figaro	Glyndebourne	Hall
Tosca	L.A. Opera	Judge
1990		
School for Scandal	RNT	Peter Wood
Bookends	West End and tour	Sherrin
Attila	Opera North (costumes, Deirdre Clancy)	Judge
1991		
Timon of Athens	Young Vic	Nunn
Long Day's Journey Into Night	RNT, London and Bristol	Howard Davies
Figaro	Salzburg, Austria	Hampe
Madame Butterfly	L.A. Opera	Judge

1992		
Gift of the Gorgon	RSC, Stratford	Hall
Peter Grimes	Glyndebourne	Nunn
Flying Dutchman	ROH, London	Judge
	(costumes, Deirdre Clancy)	
1993		
Love's Labour's Lost	RSC, Stratford	Judge
Piaff	West End and tour	Hall
La Favorita	WNO	Rennie Wright
Norma	Scottish Opera	Judge
	(costumes, Deirdre Clancy)	
1994		
Twelfth Night	RSC, Stratford	Judge
	(costumes, Deirdre Clancy)	
The Devil's Disciple	RNT	Christopher Morahan
	(costumes, Deirdre Clancy)	
West Side Story	Melbourne, Australia	Judge
A Christmas Carol	RSC, Barbican	Judge
	(costumes, Deirdre Clancy)	
Figaro	Glyndebourne	Stephen Metcalf
Don Quixote	ENO	Judge
	(costumes, Deirdre Clancy)	
1995		
West Side Story	Sydney, Australia	Judge
Twelfth Night	RSC, Barbican	Judge
The Millionairess	GB tour	John Caird
	(costumes, Deirdre Clancy)	
Skylight	RNT/West End/Broadway	Richard Eyre
Absolute Hell	RNT	Anthony Page
	(costumes, Deirdre Clancy)	
Love's Labour's Lost	RSC, Stratford	Hall
	(costumes, Deirdre Clancy)	
Julius Caesar	RSC, Stratford	Hall
	(costumes, Deirdre Clancy)	
Falstaff	Dusseldorf Opera	Hampe
La Belle Vivette	ENO	Judge
	(costumes, Deirdre Clancy)	
1996		
Troilus and Cressida	RSC, Stratford	Judge
(Several revivals)		

1997

Peter Hall Old Vic Season (twelve play repertory)		
Samson et Dalila	Brisbane, Australia	Billie Brown
Simon Boccanegra	ROH, London	Hall

INTERVIEW WITH JOHN GUNTER - 12 NOVEMBER 1996

I'd like to start by asking you the interviewer a question. Why are you producing a book based on what theatre designers have to say?

Because I feel that, considering the primary importance of their input into a production, designers' ideas and opinions are under-represented and their r*le is still not fully appreciated or understood. I want to give designers a voice and a platform.

Good. I'm glad someone is.

What sort of working relationship do you prefer to have with a director?

I get frightened if I'm given too free a hand. I prefer a genuinely collaborative experience and it becomes that if you're working with a visual director. By that I mean a director who can add to and exploit what you've created, both in preliminary discussions and in rehearsal. It's good to be provoked and surprised. The worst sort of director is one who can't make up his mind. You are endlessly putting forward ideas and there's neither development nor conclusion. Then there is the other extreme which, fortunately, I've only once experienced - being told exactly what to produce. That was when I designed **Falstaff**, working with a German director. We'd done an earlier production together and he wanted an exact replica - twenty years later. Fortunately that's a rarity.

Can you describe the process which produces what you consider to be the best work?

It's an awful prospect to consider that what is there in the model will turn up as an exact copy on the stage. What inspires me is discovering, through a director and a lighting designer, ideas that I would never have thought of myself, and then seeing the space changing again once it is possessed by the actors and our rôle is obsolete. It's the non-pejorative sense of compromise. With **Troilus** for example, we knew that there wasn't a rehearsal room big enough to encompass the set, which was risky, but once we got into the theatre Jo (Fiennes - Troilus) hugely enjoyed taking advantage of the scale. He used every corner. I have to admit that Victoria (Hamilton - Cressida) was frightened of it and that can, of course, be a problem.

I do need to have a brief. Usually it's the budget which creates the first restraint - although even that situation can vary. When I was working in Salzburg, I didn't know what the budget was - money seemed no object - and I found that difficult. What was a particularly useful practice in Germany was the system of the *bauprobe*. There's no translation because we don't do it here. You could describe it as mounting the set. It's a process where the designer takes his ideas to the theatre. If it's at Bayreuth, you have a week in which to, literally, build ideas for each scene. In a crude form and with very basic materials, you can experiment with various shapes, sizes and levels and try them out with the performers. The designer and the director and the technical director look on from the auditorium deciding what works and what doesn't. It's hugely helpful for dealing with problems such as audience sight-lines and the singers being able to see the conductor and so on. What it does prevent is some very costly mistakes occurring.

Do you know of this practice ever being tried in this country?

I tried at the National, but it was impossible. It threw the workshops completely. Our scene shifters aren't carpenters here, whereas in Germany they are - however crude.

Unlike several designers of your experience, you haven't ever tried your hand at directing. Are there particular reasons for this?

The main problems with designers who've turned to directing is that so often they don't really know how to work with actors. If you can't communicate an intellectual grasp of the text strongly enough, there's no point in trying to be a director. When I work with Trevor Nunn or Peter Hall, I witness the relish with which they explore and uncover the meanings in the text with the actors in rehearsal. That is such a particular skill. Putting those building bricks down takes an enormous amount of time and energy. I've seen designers whose idea of directing is to push actors around on 'their set'.

But don't you find yourself choreographing as you create your design - deciding where actors will be at a certain point?

Of course. In all of my photographs and models I place cut-out characters and the director and I move them about. The ideas are of course not always followed through. That's the nature of the rehearsal process. I remember Deirdre Clancy's costume drawings for an Edward Bond at the Royal Court. They showed the characters so exquisitely placed in the space that Bill (Gaskill), the director, used her drawings as his bible. Alison Chitty, I know, does a story board to get the sense of movement. Not all designers do - Frigerio for example, produces the most impressively detailed drawings but never has any people in them. They aren't scale drawings - it's a very nineteenth-century process - but his understanding of line and perspective is faultless.

Do you think you can define 'good' design?

I think I've touched on it already. Good design is when the visual and all the other

components of the production are equally matched - when total collaboration has been achieved. If the curtain goes up and the audience applauds, that's a disaster. It relegates the set to a diversion. I think actors are always going to be more interesting than the set. An actor has to be the focus of attention, but within the right context. A good example of that is the recent Albee **Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf** at the Almeida. It's set in a bear pit - which is just what's needed psychologically. Because it's a very small theatre it's a very confrontational experience for the audience. That, for me, was a perfect example of director-designer collaboration.

Was what you admired then, like the Brecht/Nehr boxing ring, the finding of the perfect metaphor?

In a way, but all-embracing metaphors can be dangerous. They can be dead-ends in that they can't develop in the way that a text develops.

Twelve years ago, Ralph Koltai designed a Troilus and Cressida for the RSC that was a clear metaphor. It was a semi-ruined, once grand house, under siege of war. But it was non-realistic enough to avoid being limiting. Is that what you are referring to - a metaphorical idea - but one which is open-ended?

Absolutely. And the Peter Hall/ Lesley Hurry sand pit achieved a similar flexibility for that particular play in 1960. What you want to avoid is dictating to your audience. You never know whether they are going to come with you or get diverted and go off on their own journey - one different from the one you are trying to suggest. The art is trying to get that balance between suggesting and dictating. Often it's the 'brilliant' designs that do this least successfully. The shows that I have been involved with that make the best theatre - those that have been fully integrated in terms of performance, direction and design - are

not those that I felt have had the 'best' designs. By 'best' I mean the most technically brilliant or flashiest such as **Guys and Dolls**. I've just done **Skylight** and what was so pleasurable about that was not that the end-product was spectacular - it wasn't - the design was functional - but that the visual contribution was right for the piece. And it was so well worked by Michael Gambon.

I'd like to at least begin to analyse the collaborative process. If you are working with, say, Deirdre Clancy as costume designer, how do you set about designing the piece?

That's an extreme example because I know Deirdre so well. We've worked together for over twenty years and done as many shows. I usually have the initial discussion with the director and then Deirdre will have her own discussion that will usually be affected by what I have come up with. We very rarely all three sit down together. We don't need to because we know one another as people and as artists. That's been the case with working with Ian (Judge) a fair amount and with Richard Eyre.

Do you prefer to create the set design and work with someone else doing costume?

I enjoy doing both occasionally but I acknowledge that I have my limitations.

Do you think that the costumes and the set should be 'saying' the same thing? They plainly weren't in <u>Troilus</u>.

As long as the controversy between them is deliberate and worked out, then I think it's more interesting not to merely underline.

What spaces do you prefer to work in?

I've never worked in the round so I can't comment on that. One of the hardest spaces to work in I find, is the Swan. That's because the architecture is too dominant. One could say the same about the RNT but I have greatly enjoyed working on the Olivier stage because I have done it wrong. I don't use it the way it was intended to be used. I use it as a proscenium stage. It's a dynamic space, but its thrust is actually less than six feet so it's unworkable. Another space that gives the impression of liberation - the Sydney Opera House - is actually very restricting. That shell-shaped roof makes it very difficult to design for.

What about the RSC main stage?

I don't mind it - although it is a bit of a dog's dinner. There's this enormous forestage, then you have the old pros arch and then there's the not-very-generous upstage area. You feel you've got two stages to deal with, so the tendency used to be to decorate the upstage area to make comment. A director nearly always drags the action down onto the forestage - understandably. That's why with **Troilus** - and almost everything I've done there - I pushed the set through the pros.

You have designed more for theatre than for any other medium. What genre do you prefer to work in?

Difficult. I've come to opera comparatively late and I enjoy it because it is such a non-naturalistic medium, although I started off being just that - far too naturalistic. When I did **Albert Herring**, at Glyndebourne, partly as a result of a generous budget going to my head, I designed not just a shop but the whole street. The first time we tried the scene

change, I think it took about forty minutes! But after a couple of days, the stage-hands - who really are some of the best in the world - got it down to under two minutes and I discovered that eventually it was considered a privilege and a treat to be taken by the Christies up to the fly tower to see that scene change.

Do you find it a problem working in opera where the conductor is at the head of the artistic hierarchy?

I can understand the concerns of a conductor. I think it's a frightful situation where the conductor so dislikes the design for the production that he can't bear to look up from the orchestra pit. And this is what's happening at the present with the Covent Garden **Ring**. It should never have got that far. Conductors understandably hate the idea of a visual concept which either distracts the audience or doesn't do justice to the music. This is how they have come to distrust designers.

I think that we should really look at what we do and why we do it. Perhaps, as a result of the big musical spectaculars, we *have* over-emphasized the place of design and led an audience to look rather than listen. We need to deal in essentials. Simpler designs are much harder to do.

Let's go back a bit. I started off in the era of Messel. Then came Sean Kenny to blow a lot of that away and there was Ralph (Koltai) who taught me at Central. Then I went off and worked at the Royal Court and became a part of that social-realist school. I found myself working abroad a lot after that, because the wealth of writers we had in England at that time were being translated and performed abroad and what was needed was a designer who understood them. The writers I'm talking about are the ones we'd been working with at the Royal Court such as Bond and Storey. Working in Germany in the seventies I

realized that, mainly because they had so few new playwrights of their own at that time, they were looking at the classics in a totally new and revolutionary way. Not only did they have the vision, but they had the budgets to produce some extraordinary work. This began to creep across the channel. I was head of design at Central by that time, so I encouraged the students to look at German theatre magazines. These contained very high quality photographs of the most fascinating designs and students were very influenced. But it became a liability because they didn't understand how the performances worked. You can't simply lift design ideas and impose them on what were often social-realist pieces, because that was what was being written in this country at that time. Such an approach was appropriate for opera, yes, but if the design doesn't interpret the written text - instead it's placed on top of it - then that is not what design should be doing.

Does it concern you that your images are not interpreted in the way you intended them to be? For example, I conducted a questionnaire based on the design for Troilus, and one question I asked was, 'What does the set remind you of or make you think about?' These are some of the answers I got: 'Bloody battle scenes; hospital waiting room; ancient city - war torn; Dali painting; Polish Gothic Church; depressing; Adventure Playground.' The critics were more unified in their reading. With the exception of 'Italian gladiator movies' from The Sunday Times, there was 'battered corridor of iron' (The Observer), 'patched and shell-shocked metal walls' (Theatre Magazine), 'corrugated iron hint of 20th century wars' (Stratford Herald), 'Walls of Troy' (The Stage), 'tin-laced wall' (Time Out).

It's all of that really. A lot of what I intended is alluded to there. It was certainly meant to be war-torn. It could have been any battle arena from Ancient Greece to Bosnia. The images ranged from shields to tin hats. It was an attempt to suggest what happens after seven years of war.

Reading of symbols is notoriously 'open'. In my questionnaire asking the audience what they felt the hanging orange/red orb represented, I got: 'shield; pendulum; moon; passing of time' amongst the readings.

It was all that.

And the thorn-bush? I noted its practical function in that it suggested a domestic *exterior* - in the text it's an orchard I believe - but was there a meaning radiating beyond that?

I was influenced by the documentation of the first world war. There are no trees left alive. They are dead. The link is very strong between sex and death. The sexual behavior of people in war is very different from that of peacetime. It's a fear of that link that has fuelled the controversy about the film **Crash.**

Is that link there in the use of red as a colour? The colour of the sky suggests the torch-and-burn aspect of war and the heavy red drapes the highly sensual couplings...

Certainly. I 'm very interested in the emotional effect of colour. You look at someone like Hodgkin and you can see just how emotionally charged a particular colour can be.

It's fascinating how many theatre designers quote Hodgkin as an influence. Is it because he's not a purely abstract painter? He says he needs text, that he needs verbal stimulus in order to respond emotionally. To a large extent this is the r*le of the designer isn't it?

Absolutely.

From a technical and aesthetic point of view, I had a problem with the tower trucking in and out. The set had the characteristics of a unit set and then suddenly we had a scene change in the sense that 'scenery' came on. Presumably the tower was rather noisy to operate as its maneuverings were always covered by pre-recorded musak.

The tower was there as a means of dealing with the many, many domestic scenes in the play. Shakespeare was obviously writing the warriors return scene with a balcony in mind.

But the balcony of the tower is another public space really, isn't it - rather than a private?

What it does do is to shut off enough of that huge area in order to contain a more domestic or personal space.

To be quite honest, I think that particular production was over-designed. It was my intention to examine that space - to find a way of cutting across that arch. Then there were the two factions. How do you do it? Do you have separate locations? And then, of course, there are the domestic scenes to contain.

How did you deal with the interior/exterior location of the piece when you were planning the design?

Particularly for the Paris/Helen scene, we used drapes to block off the wall and to

emphasize their grossly hyped-up sensuality. We wanted as many entrances possible for Pandarus and for Thersites who could be voyeurs from both above and below. Hence those steps leading down below the forestage.

Apart from providing the variety of exits, did you have any say in how the set was used by the actors? For example, the first half was very formally and operatically 'blocked' wasn't it?

That's very much Ian's style.

And that huge, imposing upstage door. That was used only once in the first half and that was for a very laborious entrance of the table. Was that a technical problem?

Yes I'm afraid it was. It was intended to be for Priam's entrance.

But that was long after the table.

Yes. It happened in a way a lot of these things happen. Originally the design had no table - just chairs, but in the course of rehearsal, the table and the food were introduced to emphasize the family element. You can't use that door too often anyway. It gets boring.

How involved are you with the lighting?

It's such a specialized field now. The technology is astounding and it's changing all the time. I bring a lighting designer in at the early stage of the model and I enjoy working with him in some detail.

Are you concerned about sound design? The contemporary definition of scenography contains the ways in which both lighting and sound fill the space.

Every emotion being spelt out by music is an influence from the cinema. The text doesn't need that sort of over-emphasis.

That's not always the function of music, surely. What about McKellen's film of Richard III? Trevor Jones' jazz pastiche in that film was used ironically and to great effect. I have to confess that I found the music in Troilus ingratiatingly sentimental and facile. It added nothing.

I couldn't agree more. Let's just say that wrong decisions were made which then couldn't be reversed. This is what makes theatre such a fascinating medium to work in. There are so many variables. No one can play the great Architect.

IAN MACNEIL

WORK	COMPANY/VENUE	DIRECTOR
1989		
The Turkey who Fought Back	Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh	B. Twist
Spinning a Line	Traverse Theatre	Ian Brown
The Idiot	Contact Theatre	J. Jinman
Anatol	Theatre Clwyd, Mold	M. Calderone
She Stoops to Conquer	Theatre Royal, York	D.Nichols
An Inspector Calls	Theatre Royal, York	Stephen Daldry
An Inspector Calls	Everyman, Cheltenham	J. Durnin
Temptation	Westminster	J. Roose-Evans
1990		
Tally's Blood	Traverse Theatre	Brown
Figaro Gets Divorced	Gate Theatre	Daldry
Jerker	Gate Theatre	Daldry
Don Gill of the Green Braces	Gate Theatre	L. Boswell
Crackwalker	Gate Theatre	J. MacDonald
1991		
Pioneers in Ingolstadt	Gate Theatre	Daldry/ Annie Castledine
Manon Lescaut	DGOS Opera Ireland	Daldry
Talking in Tongues	Royal Court, London	H. MacDonald
Wild Oats	Northcott Theatre, Exeter	Durnin
1992		
Death and the Maiden	Royal Court/UK tour/Duke of York	L. Posner
An Inspector Calls	RNT, London	Daldry
1993		
Ariodante	ENO, London	David Alden
Machinal	RNT	Daldry
Macbeth	RSC/tour	A. Noble
1994		
Ariodante	WNO	Alden
Picture of Dorian Gray	Lyric, Hammersmith	Neil Bartlett
The Editing Process	Royal Court	Daldry

1995		
Enter Achilles	DV8 UK tour	Lloyd Newsom
1996		
Tristan and Isolde	ENO	Alden
Body Talk	Royal Court	Daldry
1997		
A Winter's Journey (film)	Third Eye/Channel 4	Alden
La Traviata	Bastille Opera, Paris	Jonathan Miller
Bound to Please	DV8 UK tour	Newsom
This is a Chair	Royal Court	Daldry

STEPHEN DALDRY

WORK	COMPANY/VENUE	DESIGNER
1983		
It's a Bit Lively Outside	Crucible Theatre, Sheffield	Bruno Santini
1984		
Of Mice and Men	Manchester Library Theatre	Santini
1987		
The True Story of the Titanic	Crucible Theatre	Simon Vincenzi
Out With a Bang	Crucible Theatre	Tim Bickerton
1988		
The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist	Stratford East/ Liverpool Playhouse	Geoff Rose
Badlands	Battersea Arts Centre	(no designer)
1989		
Judgement Day	Old Red Lion	Claudia Meyer/ Minnie Grey
An Inspector Calls	Theatre Royal, York	Ian MacNeil
1990		
Figaro Gets Divorced	Gate Theatre	MacNeil
Jerker	Gate Theatre	MacNeil
1991		
Pioneers in Ingolstadt and Purgatory in Ingolstadt	Gate Theatre (co-directed with Annie Castledine)	MacNeil
1992		
Damned For Despair	Gate Theatre	Tim Hatley
An Inspector Calls	RNT and tour then transfer to Aldwych Theatre and Broadway	MacNeil
1994		
Machinal	RNT	MacNeil
The Kitchen	Royal Court	Mark Thompson
The Editing Process	Royal Court	MacNeil
1995		
Rat in the Skull	Duke of York (Royal Court Season)	William Dudley

1996		
Body Talk	Royal Court	MacNeil
1997		
This is a Chair	Duke of York/Royal Court	MacNeil

INTERVIEW WITH IAN MACNEIL AND STEPHEN DALDRY – 10 APRIL 1996

EP What do you think the ideal working relationship is with a director?

IM That's a hard question because I suppose I've got one and I live with him. Perhaps it's better to look at bad experiences. These happen when a director trusts a designer too much - when the director doesn't interact with a designer hard enough. There has to be interaction because the production is the sum of at least two parts. It's not enough to get the right people together for a show - you've got to have a good fight with them as well. When we're all in the room together - Rick (Fisher), Stephen Warbeck and us, the sparks can fly a bit. You have to be prepared to go along several different journeys - to work through your own clichés and then everyone else's clichés. In my experience, the best ideas happen when the director is in the room with everyone else. It has to be a collaborative effort. I know, for example, that David Alden has an arrangement with conductors whereby they attend most of his rehearsals and he will go to every orchestral rehearsal. Obviously a designer has to do a lot on his own - endless drawings and so on - but in my experience the moments of recognition happen collectively.

EP Stephen, can you define this relationship?

SD It's very difficult because it's like trying to define an ideal marriage. There isn't necessarily a model and you have to re-invent each time.

EP But you have to start somewhere. For example, some directors choose a designer for a particular aesthetic. Have you ever done that?

SD No. The aesthetic should be the outcome of discussion. I think there's a danger and a limitation in pigeon-holing designers. You know, Tm doing a Racine, I'd better have a Mark Thompson, or it's Germany in the thirties, that's the MacNeil

look.' The way I work is to strike up the relationship first and then, if a suitable project comes along we'll do something together. There are many, many good designers. The only criterion I can apply is whether or not we'll work well together - whether we'll productively fire one another up.

EP **How do you find these new people? From seeing work of theirs that you like - or what?**

SD If you run a theatre, your working life and social life totally overlap, particularly if your partner is in the same business. Last year there were twenty-three designers working in the Royal Court, so of course you get to know them and their work.

EP **Once you and a designer have agreed to work together, how does the process begin?**

SD Once again, there are no models. It's different each time.

EP **How do you and Ian work together then?**

SD Because we live together it's particular and peculiar. With us it's a hugely traumatic and emotionally draining experience each time we do a show. We live it and work it as intensively as is possible and because we are who we are, we inevitably tap into one another's deepest and darkest fears.

EP **Do you look at the text together?**

SD We don't, although, again, there are no rules. How many times do you need to read a play, I often wonder? For me, the first reading is important because the whole of the rest of the process tends to fit around those elements that first attracted me to the piece. It's the instinctive response that you are trying to

recreate, both through the design process and through rehearsals. The first reading is therefore quite a holy experience and I find I have to be quite careful about the context in which I read a play that's new to me.

IM I suppose we're both looking for the emotional centre and our initial discussions are along that line rather than working out practicalities such as how many doors do we need.

EP **Are you aware of any demarcation of decisions and ideas?**

SD I think that's an insidious question. It's a matter of leading and following...

IM In my case, nudge and push - often in quite a bullying way. You're not aware, and shouldn't be, finally of 'whose idea was that?' You needle away until something happens. It's a bit like therapy.

EP **Are you aware of using a particular sort of vocabulary when you discuss projects - particularly at the gestation stage?**

IM Not really, although there is a shorthand for particular visual clichés. 'That's much too so-and-so.'

SD And that's not just bitchiness, it's an attempt to de-baggage yourself and make sure you're not being over-influenced by the work you've seen and that you're trying to approach the piece with as much freshness as possible.

IM You have to be honest about your influences. For example, I saw Pina Bausch about four years ago and although it's not my style at all, I was knocked out by it and I'm still digesting it. I wish I could do shows as exciting and memorable as that. You have to work out what made it so enthralling and not try to imitate it, but acknowledge it.

EP **So your shared visual vocabulary is based on shows you've seen together?**

IM Not really, because we see a lot separately and of course we don't have shared memories from before we met one another. But a particular image can have a potency even if you didn't see it yourself but it was important to someone else and that person describes it vividly and sensitively. I never saw **Hairy Ape** - Stephen did - but I have a very strong picture of it.

EP **Are you aware of any influences other than theatre in your work? What else do you draw on?**

IM Childhood mainly. I lived very intensely in my imagination as a child and I recall that quite strongly.

SD Trying to get to a child-like state when you approach any play is quite tricky. After the process of apparent sophistication, you've got to lose that and return to an innocent simplicity where you can ask questions such as, 'What's happening now? What's going to happen?' or, more crucially, 'What would you like to happen?'

IM Stephen does articulate very honest and straightforward responses to plays. It's not an oversimplification, it's clarity.

EP **Have you ever been tempted to become a director, Ian?**

IM Not really. I think I'd know by now if that were what I wanted to do. I'm glad I can see from the angle of the performer - I used to act - and maybe I'd like to try directing in the way you want to try things to see what they are like - but I don't have a burning desire to *become* a director, no.

SD I'm just not convinced it's a good idea. There are honourable exceptions of course,

but on the whole, it's like theatre directors wanting to become movie directors. Occasionally it works, but that must be accident, because not only is it a different medium but it's a completely different job. Just because you're good at one doesn't mean you'll be good at the other.

EP **So what special skills does a director have that a designer doesn't - given that most directors are untrained in their profession?**

SD The rôle of both director and designer has changed a lot over the last ten years or so in Britain. The old fashioned idea of director as a guru who reveals the meaning of the text has largely disappeared - they're even *beginning* to move away from that at the RSC. As the role of the director changes, so does that of the designer and his relationship with a director. A director is not so much an *auteur* as a core creator. You can't call Peter Brook a director of plays in the way you can Peter Hall. Brook's relationship both with the company and the text is different - and there are others who don't fit the traditional model - mainly women such as Deborah Warner, Phyllida Lloyd or Katie Mitchell. The designer's status is in flux and understandably they get upset about this. A common complaint is that they've done the primary work. They've realised the world of the piece on two meetings and half the royalty of the director. In the end, I'm afraid that that's what it's about - the inequality of payment; so that ought to change.

EP **And the hours a designer puts in? The all-nighters?**

SD You can't measure time in that way. It's what you bring to those hours.

EP **Is one of the reasons that designers get into the 'I can do that' mind-set because they've worked with bad directors?**

IM There are a lot of good designers around but there's a shortage of good directors, so good directors who are the flavour of the month get too busy. So yes, that is

often the reason. I want to develop this idea of how the rôles are changing. To give you an example: Bill Forsyth, the brilliant American choreographer, turned down a commission for the Royal Ballet because he said he'd just realised he wasn't really a choreographer any more in that he was completely reliant on the dancers he worked with. Their creativity input was certainly as great, if not greater than his. Yes, he co-ordinates it and is responsible for it, but it is only the sum of the parts of the talent in the room. Lloyd Newsom calls himself an artistic director and not a choreographer because he realises his is a co-ordinating r*le too. The fact that there are so many good female directors working now has had a bit to do with this shift. They are not prepared to pretend that they have all the answers and they can use that fact that they haven't confidently and creatively.

EP **Is it perhaps the fault of managements in that they haven't yet latched onto this fluidity of rôles and they insist on a particular fee structure, hierarchy and time-table? For example, it's still expected that the model should be there on the first day of rehearsal in some institutions isn't it?**

SD We resist that totally. **Machinal** threw the National upside down, but luckily we had a good show so it was accepted.

IM You do have to be careful here. Yes, the institutions lag behind the process and of course a designer should be allowed to workshop a show and discover what it's about before s/he commits to some physical structure. Designers go through a crisis of having to make important decisions before they're ready to, in the knowledge that to change those decisions will create chaos. In the rehearsal room it's all organic and fab and the poor designer has to keep up the pretence that this *thing*, thought up four months ago, is still exactly right. It's an absurd system, but it's the one we have and thank God it's not America, where it's even worse. There, you go into rehearsal thinking, 'The worst thing that could happen here is that someone could have an idea. That would really blow the organisation apart.' However, devised shows aren't a designer's dream by any means, because you

haven't got workshops equipped to cope with late decisions - there isn't the technical or managerial back-up - in the end it's simply seen as the designer's problem.

EP **Are you concerned about how an audience interprets the design of a show?**

IM No. It should be an emotional experience and if you start intellectualising about it, you fail.

SD You have your gut reaction, then you test it intellectually. Otherwise it's sterile.

EP **So you expect a spectator simply to say, 'It made me sad/surprised' rather than, 'Having the house on stilts heightened its vulnerability/significantly distorted the perspective...' - or whatever?**

SD You're falling into the trap of confusing post-production analysis with the actual experience of watching the play. And the process of *making* the play is different again.

EP **But you'd surely admit that in the *process* of putting a show together you're trying to communicate certain ideas or feelings, however child-like. You're going on a particular journey and what if that audience isn't going on the same journey as you? What if those ideas aren't coming across to an audience at all or that they are, but in a completely distorted form?**

SD So what. As individuals, they all bring a separate set of experiences to their understanding of the piece, so you can't legislate about their reaction. That's not to say that I'm not interested in people's views. Some people have an amazing take on what they've seen.

IM I've got three essays by American academics in my drawer on **An Inspector Calls**, which I haven't read. I'm interested that I'm no longer interested, because when I was at university, I would have been writing stuff like that. What I'm concerned about, rather than a specific reaction, is getting a design correct.

EP **What do you mean by that?**

IM I see the interpretation of a play as a prism. As a designer, you have all these feelings about a piece and you have to express those through a very narrow medium which is the actual staging of the piece - and then all these meanings are radiated out to an audience. You can control the shape of the prism and you need to get it 'correct' but you can't control its effect - what the colours mean to the eye of each beholder.

EP **Can you define what good stage design is actually doing?**

IM It's helping the experience.

SD Balls. You've got to buy into the experience first. You can't divorce the design process from any other process by which the show has been created. Often a bad design is absolutely appropriate for a bad show. When do you get a great production and a terrible design - or a great design and a terrible production? A good show is a seamless combination of design, direction, performance and text.

EP **So a design can't patch over or fill in the cracks of a written text?**

SD That's bollocks. You simply can't separate out the experience like that.

IM Critics are particularly guilty of this. They pontificate about the relationship of text to design without having earned that authority. They don't know about any of

the thinking that has gone into creating this performance. They are only concerned with the result.

EP **Do you think we've got a problem with critics?**

IM Not compared with America. British critics do try, but they lack any visual vocabulary and they have no understanding of the craft or process involved. At least we have diversity in Britain, although there's often a literary sterility and predictability in theatre criticism. I worry that their terms of reference are so narrow.

EP **Do you feel the need to dictate the space in which you work?**

IM The answer to that question is at crisis meltdown point as far as I'm concerned. The problem with places such as the Barbican or the Olivier is that the ideas were ten years in advance of the buildings and we've already moved on again - or perhaps seen the need not to move on. We don't necessarily feel the same about space now. What might have been a fantastic show at the Aldwych - put that same show - and I mean *exactly* the same show - onto the Barbican stage and it just dies. Space is all-important.

SD All-important. The context dictates the language of the show.

EP **Can't you work against it?**

IM Sure. But how often can you go on doing that?

EP **So what is the ideal space?**

SD That changes play by play. You have to find a piece that will work in a particular

place.

IM I can understand how it happens the other way round - how you can walk into a space and think, 'Wouldn't it be terrific to do so-and-so here.'

EP Do you fancy site-specific work?

IM Of course - in the right circumstances. But I sometimes think that as a designer, that's my job - to make each show *feel* site-specific and that's what I really enjoy: It's a special craft exercise to make some plush theatre feel like a site.

EP How do you feel about the way the original design has to be compromised to fit onto different stages? I remember hearing the West End producer, Peter Wilson, talking about having to chop a metre or so off the legs of the Birling's house in Inspector so that they'd be able to see in the Gods. I wondered how you'd feel about that.

IM The problems are huge. Commercial producers here and in America want you to pull the rabbit out of the hat but they are fucked if they are going to give you the means to do that. American producers do their shopping at the National but they don't really listen to the creators of their purchases. The show's just a commodity. I'm not really talking about money. There seems to be no willingness to understand the essence of the show that made it 'successful' in the first place.

EP Would your like your own Bouffes du Nord, or whatever?

SD No. I wouldn't want the responsibility. It's a matter of having the space that you can alter to suit the show.

EP Do you see a designer as a primary creator or an interpreter?

IM I don't think designing is any less interpretative than acting or directing. I think

I've done my work properly if I am telling a story as well. It's a bastard art-form - there's no doubt about that - but it's far more interesting and stimulating than a lot of fine art floating around at the moment. It's commercial in that it's to order and to a deadline. It's not something you can do for yourself, on your own, in your own time. You have to extend the family and give everyone a voice. And there has to be interaction because the production is more than the sum of its parts.

EP **Given that there aren't many elderly designers, how do you view the future?**

IM There does seem to be a planned obsolescence. Both producers and directors can be guilty of being fashion victims when they 'cast' designers. And ageism is rife.

SD It is a bit frightening, because directors have the same problem. They become a huge success - possibly too early - get worked to death, do two bad shows and then the calls don't get answered. That's the culture we're living in.

IM It worries me in that I don't understand how you can develop if you're doing one show after another. When are you supposed to do the living? Surely, after a while you run out of resources to draw on? If what you create is a product of where you've been - emotionally and psychologically as well as everything else - when do you get time to have a life?

SD The problem is compounded too by the ethos of success.

EP **The opposite of the old George Devine adage of The Right to Fail?**

SD Yes. It's no longer a matter of building a body of work - it's not developmental any more. You're only seen to be as good as your last show.

IM I was actually inspired by Jocelyn (Herbert) to become a designer in the first place, rather than an actor, because I saw her as someone who was able to be

constantly experimenting.

EP **Do designers burn out, or what?**

IM I'm sure they do. Designing demands huge emotional and intellectual resources...

SD I think it's because we have no respect for seniority. There are directors - and designers - who should still be directing - teaching young directors - who've been put out to grass. I'm not saying that there shouldn't be tension between the old and the young, but there should be respect too.

EP **Is there anything that you'd like to do instead?**

IM I'm sure there is, but I'm not sure what. There are still times when I wonder what I'm going to do when I grow up and that's often when I'm doing my best work.

EP **We've talked about designers becoming directors, but didn't you design your own show at the Theatre Upstairs? How did that come about?**

SD I just wanted to see how the process worked.

EP **And how did it go?**

SD Terrible. I needed a designer! But I'm glad I tried it.

EP **Can you expand on the provocative statement you made at the theatre design conference in Manchester when you said that you had to be gay to be a good designer.**

IM I was obviously in my most strident straight-bashing period! But it is interesting that so many good designers are gay. This sort of statement comes from a

childhood full of suppressed anger about a world which pretended that gay boys like me didn't exist. So gays tend to create their own world where they don't have to depend on people who ignore their existence. Admittedly that world becomes very obsessive, but it's very understandable and I think, excusable.

EP **Isn't it a question of economics as well? You're DINKS really, aren't you?**

IM Quite. I don't do drugs, I don't climb mountains and I don't have kids. So I do shows. If I did any one of the other things I probably wouldn't be a designer.

INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY 21 APRIL 1996. SD AND IM. **'HOW WE MET'**

SD We don't become one when we work together. When you're trying to imagine the world of a play it's like handing over the baton to someone else. One runs with it for a while and then they pass it on and the other runs with it then passes it back. Unless you put in a huge amount of time together, it just doesn't work, which is why it's an obsessive relationship.

ANTONY MCDONALD

WORK	COMPANY/VENUE	DIRECTOR
1983		
Daughter of the Regiment	Belfast Opera	Sally Day
Turn of the Screw	Batignano, Italy	Tim Albery
Canso Trobar	London Contemporary Dance	Christopher Bannerman
Carnival	London Contemporary Dance	Bannerman
Under Western Eyes	Ro Theatre, Rotterdam (dance)	Ian Spink/Albery
1984		
Tom and Viv	Royal Court, London/New York Public Theatre	Max Stafford-Clark
Hedda Gabler	Almeida Theatre, London	Albery
Kingdom of the Pagodas	Royal Danish Ballet	Richard Alston
1985		
Orlando	Scottish Opera	Chris Settes
Midsummer Marriage	Opera North, Leeds	Albery
Princess of Cleves	ICA, London	Albery
Further and Further Into The Night	Second Stride	Spink
1986		
Trojans, Part 1	Opera North	Albery
Mercure	Rambert	Spink
1987		
Trojans, Parts1and 2	Opera North/WNO/Scottish Opera	Albery
Les Liaisons Dangereuses	Gate Theatre, Dublin	Ben Barnes
Streetcar Named Desire	Crucible, Sheffield	Albery
Weighing the Heart	Second Stride	Spink
1988		
Billy Budd	ENO, London	Albery
Midsummer Marriage	Scottish Opera	Albery
Hamlet	RSC, Stratford	Ron Daniels
Mary Stuart	Greenwich Theatre, London	Albery
Fugue	Second Stride	Spink
Mates	Ballet Rambert	Spink

1989		
Trojans	Opéra de Nice	Albery
As You Like It	The Old Vic Theatre, London	Albery
Heaven Ablaze	Second Stride	Spink
1990		
Beatrice and Benedict	ENO	Albery
Trojans	Scottish Opera /ROH, London	Albery
Berenice	RNT, London	Albery
Richard II	RSC	Daniels
1991		
Benvenuto Cellini	Netherlands Opera	Albery
Billy Budd	ENO	Albery
Hamlet	American Rep. Theatre, Cambridge, Mass.	Daniels
Lives of the Great Poisoners	Second Stride	Spink
1992		
Marriage of Figaro	Australian Opera, Sydney	Albery
The Seagull	ART	Daniels
Black Snow	ART	Richard Jones
The Birthday Party	Citizens Theatre, Glasgow	**Antony McDonald**
White Bird Featherless	Siobhan Davies Dance Co.	Siobhan Davies
Why Things Happen	Second Stride	Spink
1993		
Orlando	Aix-en-Provence	Chris Şettes
Wallenstein	RSC	Albery
Escape at Sea	Second Stride	**McDonald**
Wanting to Tell Stories	Siobhan Davies Dance Co.	Davies
1994		
Orlando	Paris, Théatre de Caen	Robert Carsen
Cherubin	ROH, London	Albery
Francesca da Rimini	Bregenz Festival	Robert Fortune
Nine Plays and a Recipe	Citizens Theatre, Glasgow	**McDonald**
The Glass Blew In	Siobhan Davies Dance Co.	Davies
Fearful Symmetries	The Royal Ballet	Ashley Page
1995		
Pelléas and Mélisande	Opera North	Jones
Orlando	Flanders Opera/Aix-en-Provence	Carsen
Nabucco	WNO/ROH	Albery
Baddenheim	Second Stride	Spink

1996		
Ariadne auf Naxos	Bavarian State Opera	Albery
New Languorous	Royal Ballet	Page
Samson and Delilah	Scottish Opera	**McDonald**
Jenufa	Netherlands Opera	Jones
The Country Wife	Citizens Theatre,Glasgow	**McDonald**

INTERVIEW WITH ANTONY MCDONALD - 24 JANUARY 1995

Is it possible to ensure a balanced, two-way creative relationship with a director or is the theatrical hierarchy such that this is difficult?

It's impossible to ensure that it's balanced because there are so few directors who know how to work with designers. Those that don't know feel the two elements can be separated. Some directors literally say, 'You go away and get on with the visuals', and leave you to it. But, having made that point, there does have to be a period when you can be left to work things out on your own. I had this problem the other day, working with Richard Jones. He had lots of ideas and loads of drawings - better than mine, a lot of them - and finally I had to say that I needed some time to think and he said, 'Oh I didn't realize you were of the old school of designers - in I swan in a fedora and flip through what you've done, randomly rejecting your ideas and making the odd trivial comment.' Of course I don't want that - you hope that there will be as much input from a director visually as there is from you dramaturgically. Some directors are more visually aware than others.

Is that the ideal relationship, a visually aware director?

Really it's simple. A director has to be good, to know what he's doing. But I don't believe he - or she - can be a good director if he doesn't have visual awareness. Max Stafford-Clark, for example, whom I've enjoyed working with, professes to have no visual sense. I simply don't believe it. If you're not interested in what things - people - look like, why are you a theatre director? Power? I think that you've got to find a way of being able to challenge one another - to say it's naff or you've seen it before. As a designer, you've got to feel that you're moving forward.

What about working jointly with another designer such as Tom Cairns? Can you elaborate on the working relationship here?

It worked brilliantly well for a time but finally it came to a natural conclusion. It exhausted itself. We gave each other a certain strength and we prevented one another from falling into traps, such as repeating ourselves. It's not that being a designer is exactly lonely - there's a lot of collaboration - but you do take on a whole set of responsibilities which can be good to share. We didn't make the usual division into set and costumes - we did everything together, which probably protracted the whole business. We had surprisingly few banal arguments. If one of us felt really strongly about something we would hold out until the other gave up! People still say that we have shared stylistic traits which is bound to be the case given that we worked together for several years.

What were the benefits, do you think?

I learnt from him an aesthetic grounded in a long art-school training - which I don't have. I think he learnt from me an ability to interpret, to pick up clues, from the text - and perhaps a means of verbal communication with a director. Finding a shared language.

What is this shared language?

Tricky one. With someone like Tim (Albery) who I've known for so long, it's things we've seen together which allow for a kind of shorthand. For example, last night we were talking about **Nabucco** and he said he didn't want another architectural set, so I said, 'You mean something Pina Bausch?' and he said 'Yes, but not David Alden doing Pina Bausch', and I knew exactly what he meant. Shared reference points. The problem is that

eventually you bore one another - like any relationship I suppose. I got to know exactly what he was going to suggest before he said it, and *vice versa*. That was the benefit of having Tom (Cairns) join us. It changed the dynamic - some times rather painfully, in that one of us might feel we weren't being taken seriously - that we weren't being heard, but you do need to stoke up the boilers and the threesome provided that. The working relationship couldn't get complacent.

Do you expect or welcome any input from actors? How has your performing work informed your design work?

I do like to talk to actors beforehand, yes, and ask them if they've got any ideas about their characters - and hope they don't say - which some have - that they're waiting for the costume for that! But I know some designers - Nigel Lowry for example, who I think is brilliant, who won't communicate with the singers during fittings at all. He only talks to wardrobe. When he was doing **The Ring** recently, he left a make-up design on one of the singers' dressing-room table and she tore it up! She was so annoyed that he wouldn't talk to her about it. I think you've got to talk to performers about what they're wearing and why and how it will affect their body language and so on. Particularly if it's, let's say, abstract. You need to tell a performer where it's come from and then it can help them. Even for an opera chorus, where the psychological through-line of the costume isn't quite so important or apparent. Sometimes actors have quite strong ideas about what they want to wear and that can be really helpful. For example, Mark Rylance knew he wanted his Hamlet in filthy pyjamas and that was fine by me. When I saw him in **True West** recently, I could tell that those crusty socks and those shoes were something he's worked on himself and that's great. It's often an important part of an actor's creativity - costume - whereas a dancer will wear practically anything you give them, provided they can move in it.

Why is it, do you think, that design/scenography is often still perceived as decor - even by theatre critics?

You're right. A lot of critics don't seem to understand what we're doing, but I have to say that some design *is* decor, it is window dressing, and that's often an indication that the director and designer haven't been working properly - a piece of design seems to have been put on top of a piece of action and they don't seem to relate.

What about using a painter as designer? Hockney for example.

Difficult. I think that his heart is in the right place in that he doesn't want what he does to be seen as mere decoration. For example, he has assistants who make really big models for him, which you can walk into. And he's very concerned with lighting. Perhaps if he were to direct the pieces himself, the 'decor' would be more integrated. Sets that appear simply as decor don't have any dynamic in them. They tend to be literally, flat. They don't convey a sense of a dialogue in which a director might say to a designer, 'This particular moment could be wonderful if so-and-so could appear or move or whatever'.

As for critics not understanding design. What I find bizarre is the inaccuracy. Are they colour-blind or am I? Even the period they decide it's been placed in isn't the one I put it in. I suppose that, with opera critics for example, their background, their aesthetic, is the music and it stops there. Although I do think that Tom Sutcliffe looks and sees.

How can you be sure that the audience is reading signs the way you intended them to be read? Does this matter? How much do you have to assume a shared frame of reference with your audience?

This probably sounds arrogant, but in the end I think the only person one can ever do it for is one's self. There are endless qualifications to that statement, of course. I mean you are obviously trying to communicate and you would hope that there are people who 'get' everything, but in the end you can only do what you believe is right for the piece at that time.

If a spectator imposes a meaning that you didn't intend, how do you react?

Exactly that happened with a dance piece I did for the Royal Ballet, **Fearful Symmetries**, with fabulous music by John Adams. Very American, energetic, big cities, really driving. When I talked to Ashley Page, the choreographer, we agreed that we needed all this in the design but slightly abstracted so it wasn't **West Side Story**. We wanted something visual to happen slowly throughout that expressed some of this electric quality, as abstract as the music, so we had an orange stick that rose slowly into the space. At the end, with a male and three female dancers left on stage, it came back in. Anyway, one of the critics, Jan Parry, who'd seen it several times, came up to me afterwards and said, 'I know now what's happening at the end. That's Apollo isn't it? - putting the muses to sleep and finally there's this bright ray of the sun, descending. That's what it is isn't it?'. And I said, 'Well if that's what you want it to be, fine. It's not what I intended, but I'm not going to say you're wrong.'

Do you think it matters that an audience might worry about not understanding what a particular visual symbol means?

I'm in the I-don't-think-they-should-worry school. But you can get uncomfortable audiences. I had a discussion recently with Ron Daniels about why certain directors hadn't got as far in Britain as their talent might have suggested that they should. Partly

referring to Tim (Albery) actually. And he said exactly that. Tim's productions don't make an audience feel comfortable. They worry that they aren't 'getting' it, that it's too clever for them, whereas there are some directors and designers constantly in work at the moment because they make their audiences feel good. They aren't challenging them. Not Stephen Daldry because Ian MacNeil's designs prevent that anodyne effect. Obviously, you don't want to be totally obscure. As in any art form, it's hard to get the balance right.

What sort of space do you prefer working in? Or does it depend on fixed issues such as text and budget?

Let's put it like this. There are some spaces I *wouldn't* like to work in. The Lyric, Hammersmith, for example. I've never worked there, although Neil Bartlett asked me to do something there recently. I found myself faxing back that there were enormous design problems at the Lyric and that I had never really been convinced by the auditorium and that it felt to me like something you could buy at John Lewis. There's something dead about it. It feels, probably because it doesn't have its original architectural surrounds, as if it ought to be in a Theatre Museum. I'd want to hack it about. A lot of spaces are difficult and if you believe in the project, part of your job is to make them work. I do think there ought to be more opportunity to do site-specific productions. I've never done one, but I'd like to. And if I were to do something in the West End I'd want to mess up the gilt and cherub stuff, cover it up or incorporate it - not just leave it to clash with say, some gritty piece of realism. Sometimes you just have mixed feelings. The new Netherlands Opera House in Amsterdam has got the most amazing technical facilities, but the auditorium is so incredibly wide - a bit like the Olivier - that it makes designing opera, which tends to suit end-on staging, really difficult.

Do you follow a regular practice in realizing the design - for example, model and drawings?

Pretty much, yes. In this country, you end up doing a model and technical drawings, whereas in Germany the model would be much rougher - much freer. This probably stems from our Theatre Design training that sadly tends to applaud good model making rather than good ideas. It's how you get to that model which is the interesting part and every one must be very different.

Do you do drawings first?

I do. I like to work from a lot of reference. Photographic material, paintings, and then I do loads of scrappy little drawings and that's how I move forward.

Taking something like Pelléas and Mélisande, how do you start on that?

With Richard Jones, the director, and Nicky Gillibrand, who's doing the costumes, we read the play. Several times. We decided that what we wouldn't do is listen to the music, because it's so lush, so fabulous that it imposes an atmosphere immediately. Then we talked - and talked - about the play. It's so rich in ideas and the modernity is so striking. Then, as you can see round the room, we divided it into scenes and put together various images for each scene. There are some painters such as Francis Bacon and John Kirby who informed **Pelléas.** You keep coming back to some element - perhaps the use of colour. Then we worked on a tiny little one-to-fifty model box, then a one-to-twenty-five, then, because there are so many scenes and it gets tedious shuffling things round in the model box, we Polaroid each scene so they're easier to juxtapose.

Where else do your ideas come from?

Anywhere. You can find yourself sitting here playing with sketches getting absolutely

nowhere, so you decide you'll just have to go and find another book, and it's on the bus getting there that it falls into place. When I was directing and designing some Gertrude Stein plays in Glasgow recently, I was finding it really difficult. There was no money and it was being performed in a cupboard - you know - so I abandoned it temporarily and went to see Richard Jones' **Walkũre** at Covent Garden and although I was taking it in and enjoying it, it provided a release. All those ideas in the back of my head flowed out and started to form a pattern.

What are the differences in approach to opera, ballet and theatre? Which do you prefer?

In some ways I would prefer there not to be a difference and it's really the separate practical demands that make it necessary to differentiate your approach. When I start work on a dance piece, for example, I feel 'Wouldn't it be wonderful if this could look like a play'. That's because I think people are bored by dance design clichés like flown cloths and loads of wings. So when I did **Fearful Symmetries** I tried to do something structural and to banish some of those wings while keeping a large space for dancing. And opera makes its own demands too. **Nabucco** has sixty-odd in the chorus with three bars to get them off stage, so if you had them in a box set exiting out of one little door, they'd probably pull the flat down! What's exciting is when the different media inform one another - when you can, say, inject the fluidity of a dance piece into opera. Yes, I agree I am lucky to be able to work in all of these areas. I think it came about that I've always been interested in dance and I got my first dance work by writing to a choreographer, Sue Davies, and through her Ian Spink of Second Stride, and although the dance world is very frightened of designers, once you've done some work in that field, it is willing to accept your ideas a bit more openly. I think dancers are willing to accept working with painters - often a marriage arranged by managements - 'We think it would be a good idea if you worked with Howard Hodgkin' - but the main reason for resistance

is that choreographers are a group of people least prepared to express their ideas verbally, so communication can be impossible. I think they feel that they've got enough on their plate finding a language to communicate their ideas to the dancers, so to have someone else around requiring explanation is just fouling the water. In fact I've decided to pull out of working with Sue Davies' company - much as I admire her work, because the designer is not given an artistic freedom comparable to that of the dancers and choreographers. They have a long rehearsal period that allows for a lot of experimentation and organic development but the designer is expected to come along with a finished product. It's particularly limiting with costume if the budget only allows for one shot. It's ironic that I've come to the point, because I was so miserable on the last couple of projects that I've had to do it that way, that I'd much rather work with the Royal Ballet because they've got the funding to experiment, than with the smaller companies who might be doing more exciting work.

Are there any particular design considerations for Shakespeare?

What have I done? Let's see. **As You Like It,** which I don't think I made a very good job of, **Hamlet,** which was more successful, and **Richard II** which was marginally successful - for the RSC, Ron Daniels directing Alex Jennings. There are considerations, yes. The plays move about so much, for a start. And then the language is so overpowering. Also it does hang over you a bit that when they were originally performed, it was on a virtually empty stage. What happened to me with **Hamlet,** which was my first Shakespeare, was that Mark Rylance, the Hamlet, was very present at the early meetings, and he stated clearly that all they needed was a platform, so I said, 'Then you don't need a designer. Perhaps I should go now.' He went very quiet and afterwards explained that he wasn't doubting my ideas and so on. But I did have a major problem with that production. In the player scene, I had two huge green flats behind the performers. Blank canvases.

We did ninety-four performances of this and then it came into the main house at Stratford and I was summoned by the cast, who'd formed a sort of anti-designer militant group. They wanted to grill me about these screens. What were they doing there? How could they have got there? They went all naturalistic on me. They thought they'd be dwarfed and look stupid. No I don't think they had a point and I was annoyed that Ron Daniels didn't stick up for me. It was horrible!

I've always envied the Germans their Ring Cycle, because I feel that they can say something about the state of their nation through each new production, and then I think, 'Well, we have Shakespeare.' I think we should be braver. These are the plays that can tell us about what we feel about our times now. I may be a bit perverse, but I don't feel intimidated by the richness of the imagery in Shakespeare's plays. There is a certain pressure, when you work for the RSC, to make it different from the last production of that play. Frances Roe, who ran the wardrobe for ages, knows all the plays backwards and that can be a bit worrying. You know - 'I think you're going to have difficulties with the third Duke if....' - you know. So when I did **Richard II**, I had them all wearing black so nothing could go too wrong!

Do you find yourself approaching each new work with a virgin canvas or do you feel the need to continue developing ideas you have recently been exploring? Can you get in an aesthetic rut?

This is a particularly interesting one. Sometimes you feel you want to develop an idea - it can be almost incidental - like the particular cut of a costume - and that's fine. You get it right. But then you do feel sometimes that you've got into a rut. Unless you're a Picasso, it's really difficult to re-invent yourself. You're bound to bring your own psyche and phobia to all your work, yes, your artistic baggage. And of course you dread people

saying that they've seen it all before. But there are designers such as Stefan Lazaridis who *have* re-invented themselves. He had a career in the Georgiardis look - old bottle tops and everything covered in grunge - and then he went away and came back with a completely new aesthetic. He'd cleaned his act up and he had a new career with that look. I don't think I could do that. I like to think that I've developed, but I don't think I could change completely like that.

Have you ever had the chance to do any piece more that once?

Yes. Handel's **Orlando**. I did it completely differently. The first time I did it in a very architectural space and the second time it was very abstract. I enjoyed it, particularly the second time - working with a different director and also realizing that I had over-designed it the first time and that it was better with less.

Is there any new path you want to follow?

I'd like to do some more directing. I have done some and I'd like to do more. It's not that I don't admire some - well, a few - directors, but it's this feeling that, as a designer, you have to have an overview of the piece and you feel you want to continue exploring that. In the last three years, I've directed three shows - and designed them and really enjoyed it. But I don't think I would necessarily want to go on doing both because you miss the dialogue, the bouncing of ideas, the checks and balances.

Is it managements that make it difficult to do both?

Not at the Cits. (Glasgow Citizens Theatre) where I've twice combined the jobs, because there it's all set up. In fact I don't think Philip (Prowse) will employ a director who isn't a

designer! The other company was Second Stride. They make its own rules, so there weren't any problems there either. One of the main problems about directing, having been a designer, is that to go from a certain renown to relative obscurity, you have to be prepared to earn very little money until you can build a new reputation as a director, because obviously you aren't going to be given Covent Garden straightaway. It's a totally new career really. I like the idea of designing for film - particularly costume - but I think I would find it frustrating if I wasn't brought in right at the beginning to have a say in the 'overview' and contribute aesthetically in the initial process.

I think that it's a shame that one does get so pigeonholed and it *is* difficult to both direct and design. And you're right, certain skills developed as a designer, such as diplomacy or subtlety in getting your own way, are usefully transferable. It's also a matter of advance planning, of making sure you're available at the right time so that you can subsidize your 'new' directing career by relatively lucrative design work. It's not easy.

IONA MCLEISH

PRODUCTIONS DESIGNED SINCE RECEIVING THE LONDON THEATRE AWARD, 1987, FOR THE DESIGN OF HERESIES AT THE RSC BARBICAN

WORK	COMPANY/VENUE	DIRECTOR/ CHOREOGRAPHER
1987		
Heart of Ice	Lumière and Son, The Place	Hilary Westlake
1988		
Tosca	Dublin Opera Society, Dublin	Susan Todd
Souls in Motion	Sadlers Wells, London (opera)	Nick Grace
Three Piece Suite	Sadlers Wells (dance)	Anthony van Laast & Paul Henry
Island Life	Nottingham Playhouse	Jane Collins
Action Replay	Contact Theatre, Manchester	Brigid Larmour
1989		
Istanbul Dance Show	ICL Spectrum Communications	Van Laast
Swatch Watch (Promo)	Birmingham Exhibition Centre	Van Laast
Savannah Boy	Foco Novo Theatre Co., B.A.T.	Todd
Daily Mail Ski Show (costumes)	Earls Court Exhibition Centre, London	Van Laast
'Tis Pity She's A Whore	Guildhall, London	Chattie Salaman
Entertaining Mr Sloane	Derby Playhouse	Todd
For the Love of a Nightingale	RSC Barbican	Gary Hynes
1990		
Souls in Motion	German Tour	Van Laast
The Caretaker	Sherman Theatre, Cardiff	Annie Castledine
My Mother Said I Never Should	Chichester	Castledine
1991		
The Hammer	Red Shift	Jonathan Holloway
Miss Julie	Coliseum, Oldham	James McDonald
Eden Cinema	Theatre Offstage	Todd
1992		
New Cities Ancient Lands	The Place (and tour)	Shobana Jeyasingh (choreographer)

1993		
From the Mississippi Delta	Young Vic Theatre	Castledine
Configurations	The Place (and tour)	Shobana Jeyasingh (chor)
India Song	Theatre Clwyd, Mold	Castledine
Bloody Poetry	RADA, London	Roland Rees
1994		
Pamela	RADA	Rees
Black Sail, White Sail	The Gate Theatre	Sue Parish
1995		
House of Mirth	Cambridge Theatre Company	Castledine
Women of Troy	RNT, Olivier	Castledine
1996		
Black Chiffon	Windsor Theatre (and tour)	Sean O'Connor
The Aristocrats	Embassy Theatre	Angie Langfield

INTERVIEW WITH IONA MCLEISH - 3 APRIL 1995

You have a reputation for collaborating with female directors such as Annie Castledine, Nancy Duiguid and Susan Todd. Do you prefer working with women?

I was interested that this was your first question.[1] If you look at the overall spread of my work, it's only recently that I've worked with women - and not exclusively. But Annie seems to prefer working with women now - I'm not sure why. She has worked with a lot of very good male designers. She trusts me I think. She feels that I'm on her wavelength. At first we were able to spend a reasonable amount of time during the initial stages of planning a show. Now, like so many directors, she's far too busy to go into much detail. Yes, I suppose we do have a shorthand. The other reason is probably domestic. I have two young children and not many male directors are willing or able to cope with that. Certainly not with pregnancy.

What is, for you, the ideal working relationship with a director?

Gosh. It just never happens so I don't really think about it. OK, in an ideal world there would be time to spend days going through the text, talking, arguing and sharing ideas, but what actually happens is that directors who are in demand are stacking one show up against the next and you end up having snatched conversations at rehearsals of the show they're working on then or during lunch-breaks. I have to say though, that sometimes with a really short gestation period, you can come up with some terrific ideas. It's just rather hit and miss.

Do you worry that an audience may not be reading your work in the way that it was

[1]Questions were faxed in advance of interview (by request).

intended?

It's not just *my* work though, is it? Once the whole thing is in front of you, the design is only one aspect. I have, for example, had a lot of criticism for my last piece (**The Women of Troy**). People didn't seem to understand it. Most of the feed-back you tend to get is from theatre people so I suppose they're more likely to understand what you're on about. Sometimes it's a bit upsetting to realize that some people just aren't getting the point of what they are looking at. I did have a comment from someone about a show I did called **From the Mississippi Delta** that was something like 'What a shame that they could only afford corrugated iron'.

What about critics?

They do seem to come from somewhere else sometimes. There was one critic reviewing **Women of Troy** who wrote at length about Greek amphitheatre. That was quite irrelevant to the ideas behind the production. I'm not outraged by this because any production is made up of so many different levels that any member of the audience can tune into any one of them - or make up their own. I suppose you hope that critics have some understanding of what the design is trying to do. Sometimes I think there's almost too much to take in. You can't help feeling that critics occasionally miss the point. Why over-emphasise the classicism of the piece when it seems very obvious to me that we had deliberately approached it from a contemporary political standpoint.

Which designers' work do you admire?

The trouble is that I don't really go out! I suppose when I was starting I admired Maria

(Björnson), both for her work and as a rôle model. There were hardly any women working as designers then. We are still in the minority. That's one of the reasons I like teaching - both at Wimbledon and Central - because there are a lot of female students on the design course and virtually all the tutors are male. But I do worry about the proliferation of courses in stage design. There must be a lot of money being pumped into these courses but not into the theatre generally so that when graduates leave there's no work for them. Perhaps there would be more imaginative design in television drama if theatre designers were used more.

What are your sources of inspiration?

The text mainly. I like to read it and read it and only then do things start falling into place - often in odd ways. It may be something in a magazine at the dentist's or something you see in the street or something my children observe - images come from strange places. Living in London, there is so much visual stimulation - posters, graffiti and so on. Most of the plays that I do tend to have a contemporary flavour, even if they are historical, such as Timberlake Wertenbaker's work, they are interpreted through contemporary images. I have designed **Miss Julie**, but that is not set in absolute time or location. I can't see myself doing anything like **Heartbreak House**, for some reason. I'm not good at earthbound stuff. I love doing Pinter, but then that's not 'real'. Obviously it's a matter of approach and I *am* doing an adaptation of Edith Wharton at the moment, which is firmly set in 1905 and it has to be but because of the adaptation there is a lot of spatial freedom. You can get bizarre and illuminating effects from unexpected spacing. I did a Pinter, **The Room**, in traverse with the male character in his domestic space at one end and the female in hers at the other and it was the separation and the space in between which took on a really interesting quality. When I did **The Caretaker** I had the bed on an upper level which gave

the room an extra level both physically and psychologically.

Can you describe your working practice?

I work with the model almost entirely. There is no way I could work from technical drawings. Although the model of the set has to be ready by day one of rehearsals, I find you can usually be more flexible with costume. I like to feel that I have worked out the environment, but that what happens within that is open and hasn't been limited by me. I'm notorious for not doing costume drawings in advance. I like to see the actors working and talk to them. Drawings are two-dimensional and you're dealing in three-dimensional shapes. I like to hear their ideas, although sometimes these aren't achievable financially or technically and because I have to cohere all these individual units. You have to keep an open mind - for example Leo Wringer who was playing Pseidon wanted to wear stilts and it ended up that way and it had an interesting quality, but a day-one costume drawing of a costume over stilts coming from me only, would have been absurd. I do try to avoid sets that are technically very difficult to operate. I don't think it's fair on the actors if the set becomes intrusive and a hindrance. It makes a company very uptight if they are waiting to see what is going to go wrong next.

You've worked in a lot of different spaces. Do you have any preferences?

I've got rather a taste for the Olivier now, although I know some designers find it difficult to fill. I prefer to work three-dimensionally so a big space like that, particularly with the thrust, is a joy for me. My least favourite are the proscenium arch stages that are narrow and thin. It's like watching television then. I'd like to turn it all round the other way and have the audience on stage, but obviously most managements don't consider that possible.

Some pros. arch theatres such as Bristol Old Vic are fine because they've got depth but some of the modern ones such as Winchester have got problems. I like Off Stage - a tiny little basement theatre in Camden Town.

You've done a Hamlet. Do you find that designing Shakespeare creates particular problems?

Not really. My main concern is that it's relevant for a contemporary audience. I think there is an awful lot of badly designed Shakespeare around. I mean design that seems to be at odds with the core meaning of the play. I think you have greater freedom when it's the other way round. Rather than design a Shakespeare, which has got such a weight of precedent behind it, I feel freer to explore the design possibilities of 'the greats' in other languages. It doesn't matter if it's Sophocles or Ibsen - as long as it's a good, vibrant translation....

Do you have ideas about how you would like to see your career develop?

No. No. It's quite worrying really. The important thing for me is to keep working - personally and because I'm supporting a family on my own. So getting work is a problem for me - especially when people label me as only working with female directors! Ideally I would like to do one big show and a few interesting smaller ones that don't pay much. But that's hard to organize. I did have a full time lecturing job at Central but although I enjoyed the actual teaching there was so much administration and so many meetings that I felt I was losing sight of the work. So I went back to being a designer full time. It's an odd decision because I don't think I've ever worked on a show, whatever the budget, that hasn't involved some crisis - some element of 'sheer hell', but I do love to see my ideas realised

on stage and it all coming alive. One of the answers is a good assistant - someone you can really communicate with. On my last show I had a much better dialogue with my assistant than I did with the director. The director was always busy. I know a lot of designers want to direct, but I wouldn't. There are too many things to have to think about at once. I do think that having children - which is unusual for female designers - has changed my perspective actually. Before, once a production was on, my work was over and I wasn't needed any more. I used to feel what I now recognise as post-natal depression. Now, because my children are more important than anything, when I come home to them, I find it easier to get my work into some kind of perspective.

Would you like to work in opera?

Opera is quite a problem for me because I worry about the supremacy of the conductor. If you do a Shakespeare, you can make as many cuts as you like but it seems that in opera the music is treated with too much reverence. Why can't it be adapted? Everything else is. Why can't other sound effects be added?

So you think opera should be de-constructed?

Yes. Why not?

What do you recommend that your Theatre Design students read?

There isn't anything theoretical to read that I know of. What I think is important is that they read scripts. Text after text. Not primarily to visualize, but to understand what texts are about. Only then should they start visualizing. Otherwise it's just décor. That was the

way I was taught at Wimbledon by Richard Negri. He was an inspiring man. He emphasised the need to understand, to tune in to what a play is about before you start any work on designing it. And he really understood theatre spaces. Look at the Manchester Exchange.

It's unusual to find stage designers actually designing theatres, isn't it? Even technical directors seldom have that input. I can't think of any one other than Peter Brook who operated with Jean-Guy Leach in, for example, setting up the Tramway in Glasgow.

Perhaps it's the impermanence that works. The feeling that the space is right for now, but that needs might change.

DAVID POUNTNEY CBE

WORK	COMPANY/VENUE	DESIGNER
1977		
The Bartered Bride	Scottish Opera	Sue Blane/ Maria Björnson
Seraglio	Scottish Opera	David Fielding/ Björnson
Katya Kabanova	Australian Opera	Roger Butlin
The Makropoulos Case	WNO/SO/TV	Björnson
1978		
The Two Widows	Wexford	Blane
Seraglio	Scottish Opera	Fielding/Björnson
Die Meistersinger...	SO/ Sydney Opera House	Björnson
Jenufa	WNO/SO	Björnson
Toussaint L'ouverture	ENO, London	Björnson
1979		
Don Giovanni	Scottish Opera	Björnson
Katya Kabanova	WNO/Scottish Opera	Björnson
The Golden Cockerel	Scottish Opera	Blane/Björnson
The Gambler	Amsterdam	Blane/Björnson
1980		
Cunning Little Vixen	Scottish Opera/WNO	Björnson
Satyagraha	Amsterdam	Robert Israel
1981		
Jenufa	Houston Grand Opera	Björnson
Queen of Spades	Netherlands State Opera	Björnson
La Fanciulla del West	Amsterdam	Schneider-Siemsson
1982		
The Flying Dutchman	Houston Opera	Stefan Lazaridis
House of the Dead	WNO/Scottish Opera	Björnson
1983		
The Gambler	ENO (costumes, Sue Blane)	Björnson
Die Walkűre	ENO	Björnson
Rusalka	ENO	Lazaridis
1984		
Osud	ENO	Lazaridis

Iolanthe	Komische Opera Berlin	Fielding
1985		
Orpheus in the Underworld	ENO	Gerald Scarfe
Midsummer Marriage	ENO (costumes, Gardner)	Lazaridis
1986		
Doctor Faust	ENO	Lazaridis
Carmen	ENO	Björnson
The Diary of One Who Disappeared	ENO	Lazaridis
1987		
Hansel and Gretel	ENO	Lazaridis
Lady Macbeth of Mtensk	ENO	Lazaridis
The Fiery Angel	Adelaide Festival	Thompson
1988		
La Traviata	ENO	Lazaridis
Christmas Eve	ENO	Blane
1989		
Falstaff	ENO	Marie-Jeanne Lecca
Street Scene	ENO	Fielding
The Flying Dutchman	Bregenz Festival	Lazaridis
1990		
Macbeth	ENO	Lazaridis
Clarissa	ENO	Fielding
1991		
Woyzeck	ENO	Lazaridis
Pelléas and Mélisande	ENO	Lecca
1992		
Königskinder	ENO	Blane
Don Carlos	ENO	Fielding
The Excursions of Mr. Brouek	ENO	Lazaridis
The Voyage	Met. US.	Israel
Terrible Mouth	Almeida	Nigel Lowery

1993		
Inquest of Love	ENO/Brussels	Lowery
Two Widows	ENO	Mark Thompson
Nabucco	Bregenz Festival	Wilmington/ Lazaridis
1994		
Fidelio	Bregenz Festival	Lazaridis
Playing Away	Opera North	Sue Huntley/ Donna Muir
1995		
The Faery Queen	ENO	Israel/ Dunya Ramicova
Twelfth Night (play)	Nottingham Playhouse	Huntley/Muir
Madame Butterfly	Bunkamura/Tokyo	Ralph Koltai
La Fedelta Premiata	Garsington, Oxfordshire	Wilmington
1996		
Aida	Munich	Ramicova/Israel
The Doctors of Myddfai	WNO	Huntley/Muir
The Nose	Amsterdam	Lazaridis
1997		
As You Like It (play)	Nottingham Playhouse	Lecca
Rigoletto	New Israeli Opera	Wilmington/ Lazaridis
Simon Boccanegra	WNO	Wilmington/Koltai

INTERVIEW WITH DAVID POUNTNEY - 13 JUNE 1995

What do you think is the ideal working relationship with a designer?

The nearest to an ideal relationship is where a designer fully understands what you want but doesn't necessarily give it you back. In that sense it's a value-added process - you feed something in and you get something slightly different back. In the long relationships I've had with various designers I find the process of who contributes what fluctuates hugely from project to project. There's no rigid pattern. Thinking of all the shows I did with Stefan (Lazaridis) - some of those pieces I came to with a very insistent and developed visual idea about how I wanted to interpret the work. In some cases he provided a completely surprising scenic resolution to my interpretation and in some instances we changed course completely during our discussion. I find I work best in discussion. I need a collaborator in order to crystallize ideas. The fact that the designer-as-collaborator might go away and come back with something quite different from what we had discussed, I find stimulating rather than threatening. For example, when Stefan and I did **Lady Macbeth of Mtensk**, I knew that I wanted to root the piece in a Stalinist experience. I felt that was what it was inherently about although I didn't have any particular idea about how we were going to solve that. Stefan came up with the idea of a prison with gangways and walkways that we hadn't actually discussed. From that we found ways of incorporating the Stalin references such as having the red flag somewhere and soldiers bursting through paper doorways. Incorporating the meat factory idea came later because we were very troubled about how to stylize the gang rape scene. As far as I remember I said something about fucking bits of meat - hence the carcasses. The point I'm making is that a good working relationship makes this mosaic or jigsaw process possible. It's quite the opposite of what you would learn at a German school of direction where you are told that you should have

your concept and that it's the job of the designer to flesh that out. I feel that in a healthy dialogue, different things come in at different times in response to different impulses and that the approach should be as organic as possible while you mould the interpretative responses into the final statement.

Given that you come from a literary academic background and most designers' background and education is visual, do you find you ever have problems communicating on a purely verbal level?

No I don't, but I think quite visually anyway. I don't consider myself to be a particularly intellectual or academic director.

And you're not the sort of director who picks a certain designer off the shelf with the notion that his or her style will be appropriate for the piece you are directing?

One of my great delusions is that, as an interpreter, I change my style according to the piece I'm directing - there may well be those who disagree! In the same way I feel a designer should be able to. Of course there might well be recognisable traits. If you know what you're going to get, there's no spark of surprise - it's a tired and repetitive business. Someone like Stefan has completely altered his style and I think it was once we started working together that he changed. His original decorative style was a result of working with directors who called for that style and he was delighted to be able to move forward into something different.

Do you refute the accusation of designers that a lot of directors don't give enough time to working with designers during the gestation period?

It all depends what's going on and how busy you are. Also, it's difficult to predict just how long something is going to take. Some projects go like lightning and others grind on as you go through endless different models.

You've had a couple of long and fruitful working relationships - one with Maria Bjõrnson and one with Stefanos Lazaridis. What brings them to an end?

It's not simply getting bored with a person. You need someone to question you, to make you justify your decisions, and the more comfortable you feel with someone, the less likely that is to happen. Not that I would suggest that either Maria or Stefan are particularly 'comfortable' personalities!

Jonathan Miller described his decision to break with the Robertson/Vercoe partnership, albeit temporarily, as akin to committing adultery. You haven't experienced that feeling?

No. I don't think so. I think it's a problem when some really plum opportunity comes up which a particular designer might really want to do, and for a variety of reasons it doesn't happen. For example, I know it was extremely painful for John Bury who after working for years and years with Peter Hall, wasn't asked to do **The Ring** at Bayreuth. Even during long relationships, I've always worked with other designers on the side, as it were.

Why do you think that designers are bothered by the hierarchical power structure and feel that the only way to get round this is to become directors themselves?

We're all at the end of different telephone lines and the designer is along the line that

starts with the director. In that sense the designer is an employee of the director, but that's where the inequality ends I think. I feel now, as a freelance director, that I too am a victim of waiting for the telephone to ring - with the right message on it. Even if the relationship between you is equally balanced, the rest of the company will behave as if the director is clearly in charge. In the end s/he is responsible for the staging as a whole.

Have you ever been tempted to put the boot on the other foot as Miller did recently with his Cosi or Stephen Daldry has done at the Royal Court, and dispense with a designer and have your own image realized by a technical team?

No. I do value design much too much to pretend that I have anything like the expertise to attempt it. I have to say, too, that I think there is a real craft to directing as well and often the results of a non-director trying to direct are disastrous.

There is the argument that designers, in order to fully understand the dynamic potential of the space they've created, have had to choreograph the show in their heads before day one of rehearsal.

I would argue - because I'm proud of my ability to use space - that I can use the set in a way that was beyond the imagination of a designer and I have to say that usually designers are gratified by how the set is inhabited and animated. Interestingly, often I don't see that quality when I see a designer's directing work. It's because there is a difference in our visual thinking. The designer's world is fundamentally static whereas a director's world is fundamentally mobile. The classic example of this difference for me was visiting David Hockney in his L.A. studio where he was showing me his **Turandot** model. He has this extraordinary walk-in model box. It's huge, with a lighting and sound system to go with it.

He sits there listening to the music, cueing the lighting and so on and occasionally he moves a cardboard figure slightly to left or right. He thinks in a series of tableaux.

There has been a fashion which we are passing through now. You could describe it as a postmodern aesthetic which is inhumane to the extent that organic lively movement is disapproved of. There's been a whole generation of style-conscious directors, particularly in Germany, who didn't want to direct the chorus, for example, and would have them standing still in a corner in a block. The idea of any messy, sweaty, human interaction was seen as rather naff. I think that that's rubbish. There has to be humanity.

Are you aware of being part of a particular aesthetic? For example, the unit-set 'concept' style of music theatre at ENO when you were Director of Productions there was very apparent and very influential.

You can't avoid being part of your time. You only have to look back at giants like Verdi to see how he inevitably expressed something of his age. I feel that as a director, as an interpretative artist, you have a duty to acknowledge fashion because you are usually presenting work from another era in a way that is stimulating but nevertheless accessible to a contemporary audience. That's your job.

Are you convinced that you and the designer between you are communicating ideas clearly enough for an audience to fully understand them?

First of all I think the event has to be communicated. That often despised element called a story has to be told. If you fail on that count, you can be as arty farty as you like, but it's all in a vacuum. On the other hand, what one should be doing is opening doors. A

completely sealed narrative is limiting. It closes doors because it limits the audience's perception to viewing only that particular event instead of allowing the story to open out in such a way that it relates to other worlds. Music has this abstract ability that makes this possible and so does design. The skill, for me, is to hold those two things - the narrative and the expressive - in balance.

Once you are too prescriptive about how something should be interpreted by an audience you may as well be delivering a lecture. I do think some German directors are guilty of this rigidity in that they are trying to ram home some specific message too hard and so run the risk of over-defining.

To take an example. At the end of Macbeth you had Fléance come on stage holding a typewriter. I remember after the show hearing members of the audience discussing what this was supposed to 'mean'. Did it mean that the pen was mightier than the sword, they wondered? So what did you intend by that visual symbol?

Well, they obviously didn't recall that Banquo, his father, had been using that typewriter earlier in the piece to record the crimes of the régime. In fact it refers to a remark by Havel when he spoke of the resistance of the typewriter.

I think that all you can hope is that you are being clear about what you are saying and that you are convinced of the reasons for saying them. If you puzzle people, that's not necessarily a bad thing.

You've just done Twelfth Night. Did you find your approach to the design and your method of working with a designer was any different from opera?

Not really. It was designed by Sue Huntly and Donna Muir, two graphic designers who designed the football opera I did - **Playing Away.** I had decided that I wanted it set in an abstracted contemporary context. The main difference was that I felt the play required a more convincing social milieu than opera usually does. This is because, when you have only written text without the addition of music as an abstract force, what the actors are saying, even in Shakespeare, is more specific and rooted in a reality. Although the set was abstracted - a swimming pool filled with cushions, for example - I had gone through the process of asking the questions. Who exactly were they? Where were they and what were they doing there? It worked in that the heart of the play, the transsexuality, took on a very strong meaning in the context we provided.

You've just worked with graphic artists. You mentioned Hockney and Gerald Scarfe did an opera with you. What is the attraction and what are the limitations of working with designers who work two-dimensionally?

The experiences have been very different. Despite the fact that he is a delightful person, the process of working with Gerald was horrendous. The main problem was that to change something with me present was anathema to him. He's used to drawing on his own until he has a finished piece - not snipping here and bending there as we talk. Without a model to play with, trying to mould these drawings into a three-dimensional event was very difficult. We ended up having to postpone the production for a year, which was extremely expensive and damaging for the company. Eventually we found a way of translating his work into something that proved to be highly entertaining and was actually a big hit.

I was wary about working with Huntley/Muir because of that experience but they adapted themselves very quickly to working in 3D and although the process for **Playing Away**

took a long time, **Twelfth Night** went much more quickly.

Why use graphic artists when there are so many talented trained theatre designers about, desperate for work?

You will see that it's very rare for me to do so if you look back at my twenty-odd years of directing. I asked them because I felt they had a fresh eye and weren't part of the design fashion Mafia which has rather dominated the theatrical scene for the last few years.

Do you think that performers should have an input into what the show looks like - particularly the costumes that they wear?

It depends on who they are and what the show is. If it's a naturalistic piece, then the actors should look comfortable with what they're wearing and that may be as a result of an actor contributing ideas, but in a stylized piece, you would get into a mess very quickly if individuals were choosing what it suited them to wear. Contrary to popular superstition, singers are much less touchy about what they wear because the music fills out their character in a way that can't happen with an actor who is relying only on written text. Singers might be sensitive about looking good, but I don't think they worry so much about whether or not the costume assists their characterization. An intelligent, visually aware actor can contribute very positively.

Do you find it rewarding after the Coliseum to be conceiving work on a smaller scale?

I've always enjoyed working in a variety of spaces. I did something at the Almeida, then

this year there is Garsington and then a huge scale operation at Bregenz. It's open air, on the lake and seats six thousand. The scenic budget is £1,000,000. We're doing **Fidelio** and Stefan is designing it.

Does that scale of production involve an immense amount of consultation with a designer?

The problem that one is likely to encounter at the conception stage is not in relation to the size of the piece. In fact we cracked this one in an afternoon. I knew what I wanted and he came up very quickly with a way of executing that. He had had a different idea but somehow they meshed. However, it has actually taken about four months of solid work to design the show to the point that it can be built. All the exact measurements, dimensions, the engineering involved - all this takes a lot of time compared to the first afternoon of talking and sketching. After that it's in Stefan's hands. I remain involved in that we will meet periodically and he will have a list of issues to sort out.

Can you give an example of the sort of dialogue you had during that first meeting?

My idea was that there was a domestic strain within the piece and rather than present a literal prison, I wanted to explore two ideas. One, that tyranny is usually underpinned by banal suburban existence and where better to show that than in Austria? And secondly, that to an extent within our domestic lives we imprison ourselves. So we're having an ordinary street with six life-size houses and gardens, a barbecue and someone washing their Beetle. Behind are the prison cells.

What are the issues about the aesthetic of scenography that exercise you most?

The whole idea of representation. I think that design should be comparable to a musical landscape. You may need the odd signpost along the journey, but there is no requirement to represent imitatively. Unfortunately, critics still don't seem to appreciate this and they still worry about non-literal representation. A designer has more creative or inventive latitude than any other protagonist in the business of interpreting and staging a text. The great skill of design is in achieving the right balance between imagination and information.

BRUNO SANTINI

WORK	COMPANY/VENUE	DIRECTOR
1982		
Nicholson Fights Croydon	Offstage	Simon Callow
1983		
Amadeus	Theatre Clwyd, Mold	Callow
One For the Road	West End	Bill Gaunt
It's a Bit Lively Outside	Crucible Theatre, Sheffield	Stephen Daldry
1984		
Shirley Valentine	West End and Broadway	Callow
Northern Mystery Plays	Crucible Theatre	Clare Venables
Of Mice and Men	Manchester Library	Daldry
Cosi Fan Tutte	Lucerne Opera	Callow
Infernal Machine	Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith	Callow
1985		
Single Spies	RNT and tour	Callow
Richard II	Ludlow Festival	Paul Marcus
Die Fledermaus	Scottish Opera	Callow
1986		
Carmen Jones	The Old Vic, London/ international tour	Callow
Macbeth	Regents Park, London	Gaunt
1987		
As You Like It	Regents Park	Maria Aitken
1989		
Ballad of the Sad Café (film)	Merchant Ivory	Callow
1994		
Feast of July (film)	Merchant Ivory	Chris Minaar
1995		
The Proprietor (film)	Merchant Ivory	Ismail Merchant
1996		
Pericles	Riverside Studios, London and tour	James Roose-Evans

1997		
Kafka's America	Southwark Playhouse	**Santini/** Patrick Kealey

INTERVIEW WITH BRUNO SANTINI - 15 SEPTEMBER 1995

You have a particularly interesting perspective in that you did a lot of prestigious design work straight out of college - the youngest designer at the Coliseum for example - and latterly you have moved into small-scale directing and designing for film. How do you chart your own career?

In many ways I feel I've come the whole journey as here I am in my late forties and I'm contemplating stopping work altogether. It could be a cross-roads or it could be a *cul de sac*, I'm not absolutely sure! I was very lucky in that I had interesting work for twenty-five years, although in the beginning it looked as though I was going to be pigeonholed into opera. My first design work was an opera, **Rosinda**, at the Oxford Playhouse and it was very well reviewed for two reasons. There was a lot of interest because Monteverdi and Cavalli were becoming very fashionable and the other was because the set - a rather bizarre piece of fiberglass sculpture - had been rehearsed on for several weeks, so that the singers were really familiar with it and happily clambered all over it. This was unheard of in the early seventies and didn't really become general practice until ten years later with Stein and so on being in a position powerful enough to insist on rehearsal time with the set, despite the extra expense inevitably incurred.

And the singers were all completely covered in gold body make-up and very unflattering satyr costumes which, again, was quite ahead of its time in terms of a total aesthetic. Did you see yourself as a pioneer?

Not consciously, but I'd been working at the WNO as an assistant on some of Michael Gelliot's productions with Ralph Koltai and they were doing some very interesting work. Their **Lulu**, for example, was extraordinary. I'd go as far as saying that Ralph is the

nearest equivalent designer icon we have working in this country to Svoboda in Eastern Europe. His experimentation with new materials and radical approaches to staging and using the space we almost take for granted now, but it was mind-blowing at the time. His work involved remarkable powers of diplomacy - I could see him as a Havel figure - he was able to persuade really entrenched, conservative managements of the validity of his often extraordinary conceptions. I don't know how he got way with his **Fidelio** in Scotland, which consisted of a marvelous giant half avocado lined with white fur. Somehow he had convinced them. When he was asked to open the Sydney Opera House, he made quite stringent demands and certainly didn't agree to do it straightaway. Then there was the famous case of the Covent Garden management objecting to his radical new **Carmen** designs on the basis that, from the Royal box, the Queen Mother wouldn't be able to see the one tiny door on the huge white circular wall. It is interesting from the point of view of the recent history of design, because at that point Ralph left, with his dignity intact, and Michael Gelliot asked David Fielding and Jenny Bevan to redesign it in a month. It was David's first big commission and, working day and night, what they produced was really rather bland and naturalistic - actually very dull. It was a good example of a young designer who hadn't yet found his 'voice'. It made one question, too, whether Gelliot had made his name as a result of the partnership with Ralph and when he was presented with less experienced designers, he couldn't come up with the goods.

It's interesting to hear about Ralph's position of power, because this is one of the most frequent complaints of designers - that within the hierarchy they don't have the political clout that is needed to achieve their vision.

I think that is changing, to an extent, as designers become more articulate. And of course it is a generational thing in that some of Ralph's students are now very influential in their own right - I'm talking about Maria Björnson, David Fielding, Sue Blane and Jenny

Bevan. Some of them moved onto the Glasgow Cits. which had a great effect on designers in that the Artistic Director was as much designer as director.

Is it fair to suggest that there was a particular calibre of design graduates coming out of the London Art colleges then?

I think it's fair to say - or at least it was then - that students from Central and Wimbledon were particularly ambitious and driven. This was partly geographical in that you had access to working as an assistant with several excellent London-based designers. But assistants weren't as common then, nor did designers have so many. Now there are so many more students coming out of so many design courses that it's more spread out and often, instead of getting their own work, some young designers are becoming professional assistants and, although it's an excellent apprenticeship it can be difficult to move on from that. I got a lot out of assisting, first of all at the English National Opera and then at the Royal Opera House, I became involved with dance through working with Barry Kay.

How were you affected by that?

It was the opposite end of the spectrum to my training. He was an extraordinary painter - he made the most beautiful costume drawings - and that was the tradition that Georgiardis came out of too. They always worked within the proscenium arch frame in a very painterly way. The polarities are interesting in that before Georgiardis started the Slade school of Theatre Design his background was painting and architecture, whereas where I was, at Wimbledon, the motivating force was Richard Negri, and he had been a ships' engineer before he started working in the theatre.

Richard Negri and Michael Elliot had an interesting working relationship didn't they?

Yes. Eventually they built the Royal Exchange theatre in Manchester, but well before that, their **Peer Gynt** at the Old Vic was a landmark production. They always had joint credits as director and designer and Richard Negri was an excellent teacher too. He had a concrete box built at Wimbledon, with two layers of moveable seating on each side and before any design project, you had to work out the spatial relationship of audience and actor. This was a wonderful way of understanding where design should start from. The second stage was finding the actor - casting it in fact. All this was in complete contrast to what Georgiardis was doing at the Slade, where students were working from the frame inwards whereas Negri wanted to work from the actor and text outwards. Negri's way of working would have made a very good training for directors because there was so much emphasis on understanding the text. I sometimes wonder whether it's a delayed result of his training that I now feel I've come full circle through large-scale opera back to wanting to work with a few actors and a text in a small space.

You've done a lot and been very successful. You returned to this country after spending several years designing large-scale opera all over the world and turned to much smaller-scale work. How did this come about?

This is another of life's ironies. Simon Callow and I were partners for a while, during which time I encouraged him to direct and we did three or four shows together at the tiny Off Stage theatre - it must be the smallest theatre in London. Because the audience is in the same room as the performers you can't hide anything. Every detail is charged with significance - it's a million miles from a **Nabucco** or an **Aida** with an orchestra pit between you and the performers. In a small space the walls of the room are the set. It's a

given. And you're almost as aware of other members of the audience as you are of the actors. I was reminded of this watching **Road** at the Royal Exchange recently. The body language of the spectators was thrown into relief by them being arranged around the performing area. It really coloured the performance - sometimes too much. I thought then that if I were to do another production in the round, I might construct some sort of barrier so that the spectators were visible to one another, but only from the waist up. From a designer's point of view, what interests me about working in the round is that far more demands are put upon the imagination of the audience because you can't get away with narrative scenery. The set can't set out to recreate reality - unless that reality is an open space - so you have to deal with the essence of the piece and ask the question 'What are we trying to say here?' rather than making vague assumptions. It makes much more interesting work which can of course be carried over to more conventional stages. I saw Sondheim's **Into the Woods** in New York with the world's most expensive gadgetry recreating the nearest to a real pine forest that could be achieved, and then I saw Richard Hudson's version which was full of wit and irony and allusion. His forest consisted of doors at the back of a box set with a forest scene painted over them, a gigantic cuckoo clock and oversized chairs made of antlers. What it was saying was so much more interesting and required so much more imaginative collusion from an audience. And, of course it reinforces the notion that television and film can do realism so much better, so why try to compete in the theatre? I find it difficult to look at - or look *through* representational design these days and I find myself wondering what the point of it is. When I saw **My Night with Reg**, I realised that presumably the excuse for such an old-fashioned clichéd set, was that the subject matter - Aids - was considered difficult and so the West End audience needed the assurance of a conventional naturalistic set. It was doubly annoying because what it needed was a starkness. The audience was massaged and passive and I'd hoped that new work had gone beyond that.

Then you did first Shirley Valentine and after that Carmen Jones with Simon Callow directing. What makes you want to change your career? Is it distaste with the hassle of getting the work in the first place or is it a fear that you may not get it even if you want it? Or is it a mid-life crisis - a need for radical change?

I do know what I *don't* want to do. I'm quite sure I don't want to deal with a commercial management again. They are so obsessed with the packaging. There are directors I would work with - such as Stephen Daldry - who I've worked with very happily before. But you have to wait to be asked. Funnily enough, a lot of what we talked about when we were sharing a flat in Manchester eventually came out in **An Inspector Calls,** and Stephen was generous enough to credit me in the programme for it. The idea we talked about - partly as a joke - was doing a radio play on stage - and of seeing action on stage that was unconnected to the voices of the actors.

What tends to happen in this business, perhaps more than any other, is that professional colleagues become friends, so is it true to say that you have got to the point that you will only work with friends?

Yes. I would prefer to work with people I know, like and respect. For whatever reason, early in my career, I didn't develop a long working relationship with a director like Maria (Björnson) and David Pountney, or Tim Albery and Antony McDonald. I really wanted that, but it always eluded me. I never got beyond three productions. It wasn't that they 'betrayed' me by moving on to another designer - it was just circumstance. I suppose the nearest was the shows I did with Simon (Callow) but that was difficult because he was re-inventing himself all the time. Initially we talked a lot, but then once he started becoming so ridiculously busy - writing, film, theatre and so on, all simultaneously - we had less and less time to talk about anything. For **Carmen Jones** we had one afternoon. I took a

set of completed models to the film studio where he was editing. We had an hour together; he suggested a few adjustments, and I went away and made them. Then we went into production. I did feel rather betrayed by that and it wasn't until long after the event that he realized how absurdly over-committed he had been. Some time afterwards we did talk about just how bad the working process had been - we weren't living together anymore - and he agreed that he took my contribution for granted and spent more time worrying about his relationship with the conductor, the singers and the management, which at the time he considered more important than the production values because he felt that these had been 'taken care of' by me.

That could be interpreted in a complimentary way, couldn't it? Your judgement was completely trusted?

To an extent. But that's no way to operate in a creative team. There has to be dialogue. And there were particularly bad times. We had a production meeting a week before we opened. It was the first time the management had seen the set - it wasn't properly lit of course - and they hated a lot of it, particularly the staircase. At this juncture I surprised myself by pointing out that it had always been in the model and that if they wanted a new staircase, get a new designer. They did, as it were, climb down, but Simon didn't back me up and I found that difficult to cope with. I realize how political it all is - and I subsequently found out that at that time the cast wanted the choreographer fired - but, nevertheless, there should have been some artistic support.

Going back to where are you now -

I was leading on to that! What I want to emphasize is how unfortunate it is that designers are so over-categorized. Maria does a wonderful musical, so she is asked to do three

more. Several of us might like to do site-specific work, for example, but because we aren't associated with that type of project, we don't get asked. Of course, although most designers will do anything, provided they are attracted to the text or the creative team - preferably both, they inevitably bring with them their personal aesthetic history and sometimes that simply doesn't gel. A good example of that were Fielding's designs for **My Fair Lady.** The problem was probably exacerbated by Jasper Conran's costumes, which were stunning, but he is a fashion designer and not a theatre designer and the skills are quite different. There was no psychological exploration of character in them and they were just showpieces. The main problem was the set. The audience for that piece hadn't been schooled in the East European/ENO concept of a unit set. They wanted lots of different representational locations. And I have to say that I don't think the text and the music could take Fielding's aesthetic either, in the way that contemporary musicals or music theatre could.

Is there a particular category that you have preferred to work within?

They all have their pros and cons. With opera you have a bigger budget and you can be ambitious and make bold statements, but you are constrained by the fact that you have to get huge numbers of people on and off the stage - quickly. Designers associated with dance have been able to provide fabulous backcloths, so they tend to be essentially painters - Howard Hodgkin's name is often invoked here - because what is usually required is an empty stage. What's interesting is when the categories are broken down. That's why I was so elated by (Glen) Tetley's innovative work. It had a scaffolding structure in the centre of the stage that the dancers used, with no back-cloth. At that time, in the early seventies, I was dying to work with some dancers and a piece of sculpture, but sadly, it never came about. Choreographers tend to be wary of anything that, as they see it, impedes the dancers. Lloyd Newsom has exploded all that with DV8 recently and

created such exciting work. And I'm really glad about that because, although I wasn't actually involved in creating that work myself, I had been thinking along those lines ten years earlier. It's an odd vicarious satisfaction. But what I do find frustrating is the realisation that managements, and to a certain extent, critics, still haven't absorbed into the mainstream so much of that visually exciting work that, for example, ENO were doing more than ten years ago.

Why is this, do you think?

One of the reasons is the commissioning process. In opera, managements are still more influenced by the conductor or music director than anyone else, and there aren't that many conductors who are interested in working closely with a director in the way that Pountney and Elder worked together at ENO. In opera, it has to be a three-way relationship between director, designer and conductor otherwise it's a no-win battle. You still see singers cast with very limited acting ability. And you still see 'names' brought in quite inappropriately - David Hockney to do **The Magic Flute** for example. Of course he's a wonderful painter, but he doesn't understand movement, so what you get is a series of very pretty tableaux. You can't underestimate the rôle of a producer, or a chief administrator like Peter Jonas who was part of the team at ENO. His job should be as creative as anyone else's.

Recently you've moved into film. How did this come about?

It's a natural progression in that I want to continue working in intimate spaces and I suppose the ability to work in close-up is the main attraction. There is a limit to how many of Becket's **Not I** you can do on stage - wonderful though it is. To explore the face, to climb down someone's throat, is fascinating. I'm interested in casting too. It's so

important. Most theatre designers have as their favourite films those that were shot in studios, not on location. The iconic production is probably Derek Jarman's **The Devils**. He moved from theatre design with Gielgud to film sets for Ken Russell and that imaginative symbolic quality shows. His is an intellectual and visual interpretation of the mediaeval world, conceived and re-presented in contemporary terms. He created a gigantic new cathedral out of white tiles, which looked like an epic public lavatory. It wasn't a Romantic ruin or on location at Rheims cathedral, he was suggesting the new and the shocking and the scale that appropriated to how people would have perceived it then. That's the sort of work that is exciting to a designer, and there are people working in this way - people such as the Cohen Brothers, a director/designer team - and of course Peter Greenaway who has realized how music can enhance the visual in a new way. What is healthy is this cross-fertilization that we are getting in contemporary culture.

Do the critics understand this, do you think?

Unfortunately, the critics don't. How many theatre critics are watching pop video promos and going to opera? They ought to be. Most audiences are way ahead of the critics. The recent 'exhibition' of Tilda Swinton asleep in a glass box showed that. People who actually saw it found it fascinating, but you still got from some 'art' critics 'Is this Art?' Does the category matter? It may be performance art or live sculpture - as long as it's stimulating, does it matter? The other reason I wanted to move on was to get away from the production-line element of some design - particularly ballet. You create the world, the environment - and that's interesting, but then you have to do a hundred and fifty costume drawings. That's a slog.

INTERVIEW WITH SIAN STERLING, MARKETING OFFICER RSC - 18 OCTOBER 1996

Marketing a whole season of plays with a unified set of images, using one artist's work, is a new idea, isn't it?

Yes. I felt that the body of the RSC's work wasn't being presented with enough strength, and using one artist has given it the cohesion and continuity we were looking for. It's a much more creative and stimulating way to work. Our job in marketing is to capture the quality of what happens on the stage and transfer that visually in such a way as to sell the product. We looked at the portfolios of a whole range of artists - photographers, painters and sculptors.

At that stage had you talked to any of the designers of the shows? Did you think it mattered whether or not the set of images you were choosing fitted in with their images?

The biggest problem is logistical. We have to work a long way ahead of the productions and when we are putting the leaflet together, we have very little to go on. We certainly don't know what the designs are - for example, what period anything is going to be set in. We often don't know all of the cast and the full creative team hasn't been assembled by then. I don't think we've ever gone to print with no director but it's come pretty close to that. All these factors have to be included in the brief that we give to the artist. To tell an artist to be as vague and as abstract as possible is a very difficult brief for him or her. Also, some directors are simply not particularly concerned about the surrounding visual material so it is difficult to enter into any useful discussion with them.

How did you come to choose Clare Parke for the 1996 season?

I knew her work - in fact I'd got into a bit of trouble using an image of hers of a naked pregnant woman with a bandage for **Measure for Measure** - and I knew that Stephen

Pimlott, the company director, liked her work as well. When we looked at her portfolio we were struck by how her photographs expressed emotion physically through body positions and although they were refreshingly contemporary, the photographs were very classic in their composition. I felt that all that expressed what the RSC is about.

Such striking images do present problems, don't they? For example, in the Nelson play at the Swan, I was waiting for the moment when we would see the General naked and huddled in the way he is presented on the leaflet and of course it doesn't happen. There is another problem with Troilus and Cressida in that the eroticism in the play is as much homo-erotic as heterosexual - if not more, and that is not suggested by Parke's photographs is it?

All Clare's images she showed to the various directors, so they weren't created in isolation. But the problem was that the directors hadn't started rehearsal. The ideas were embryonic and some developed away from the original conception, so some images are much more firmly rooted in the essence of the production than others. Actually, Richard Nelson liked that image from **The General From America** so much that he managed to persuade Faber and Faber to put it on the cover of the play text. He felt it corresponded completely with the meaning behind the play. I do think that the images are stylised enough for an audience not to be expecting literal reproduction on the stage. We are quite careful to avoid any recognisable individuals as that can confuse an audience.

Were you responsible for the Coriolanus marketing which used the Pulp Fiction references?

No, that was the London marketing team. There has to be a slight demographic difference - although they are probably going to use Clare Parke - but essentially we are trying to achieve the same objective. We want people to realize that although our remit is to produce Shakespeare, the concepts change all the time. We are not, and don't want to be seen as stuck in a particular groove of interpretation. You need a new exploration point and often that is one which will appeal to a younger audience.

So what is it that you tap into to be absolutely contemporary?

For that I rely a lot on the individual directors and on Adrian Noble's over-view of how he wants the company's work to be perceived. I don't think I'm doing anything more outrageous than what you see on the stage.

But you are trying to sell the idea?

Yes of course. But there is a huge difference in that if you are selling a bottle of beer through a television ad., you're using art to make that product interesting whereas the RSC is an artistic organization in the first place. What I aim to do is to give an impression or foretaste of the artistic experience to come. The background of someone like Clare Parke makes her very appropriate to achieve that. She started off as a model, then she worked as a dancer with Rambert and then became a photographer which explains why she understands how to communicate the physical expression of an idea. The process is rather like theatre designing. I send her the text plus what I consider to be useful background material. Then she talks to the director and works on a set of images based on her interpretation of the information she's been given.

Would you agree that you are deliberately subverting the high culture element of Shakespeare? ENO did that very successfully with their butch scene-shifter in his vest didn't they?

No, I'm not consciously subverting. Even the more controversial examples such as for **Measure for Measure** didn't contain any idea that wasn't reflected in Stephen Pimlott's production. Challenge yes, but not subversion. We're not a heritage theatre company, so we have to move with contemporary ideas and images.

How will you go about changing the image for the next season?

We needed a complete change to capture people's attention as strongly as it had been

captured this season, but in a different way, so we're going for a figurative painter called Ray Richardson. He was a contemporary of Damien Hurst's at Goldsmiths. He's actually a strongly classical painter and what is particularly striking about his work is the narrative that the paintings carry. His work raises questions. Adrian and I felt that he deals with character in a very strong manner and although we have always shied away from that before - because of the implications of period and so on - it was time for us to explore those possibilities. It's an interesting gamble because, unlike dealing with photographic images, you don't have a choice. Using a painter is more difficult than working with a photographer because I have printers' deadlines to deal with and yet I respect the fact that a fine artist finds it difficult to churn out work relentlessly. And Ray Richardson's work is huge. His canvases are five by three and a half feet. He couldn't possibly produce a painting in less than a week. Because of the way theatre is put together - for example, the availability of actors is never finalized until the last minute - time is always against me and I realize that I'm trying to achieve the impossible by attempting to make the pre-production leaflets as interesting and inspiring as possible.

Once a show is up and running can you change the leaflet?

Yes . That happened with **A Midsummer Night's Dream**. It was such a successful show that it's going on a lengthy tour. So we were able to provide a new image which would carry it forward to all those venues and of course, by then we were able to use 'real people' - actors who are actually in the cast. The same has happened with **A Cherry Orchard** now it's transferred to the West End.

Will you exhibit Richardson's work?

Yes. In our new gallery space.

Apart from the pre-production image, what are the most important marketing aspects?

Identifying the market. We have a very regular and a very informed play-goer in Stratford - returners if you like. What they are interested in is the cast and the director. The schools are most interested in whether the play is on their syllabus and the ticket price. The ideal audience is always a mixed one. The season leaflet is definitely the most important form of publicity - we don't use posters in Stratford other than for sale in the shop as souvenirs. For the Barbican season, posters are important - but I don't deal with that.

Is there any particular direction you want to go in?

I need to have the support of the artistic director to go anywhere and luckily Adrian is interested in developing the visual aspect of our work. We realize that we are breaking away from a theatre tradition and I'm anxious not to reproduce the old clichés because they don't serve contemporary productions any more. Today's audience is visually sophisticated - composed of people accustomed to debate about the meaning of the image. A photograph of a couple embracing to advertise **Romeo and Juliet** just isn't acceptable anymore. Our inventiveness has to match the creativity of the productions.

APPENDIX B

Survey

THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS REQUIRED BY A RESEARCH STUDENT WRITING HER PhD ON CONTEMPORARY SET DESIGN. SHE IS VERY GRATEFUL FOR YOUR CO-OPERATION.

Re. **Troilus and Cressida**

Do you expect set and costumes to give you a clear idea of where and when a play is placed? If not, what do you hope for in a design?

yes I would expect costumes + scenes to depict a sense of time + space.

What does the set remind you of/ make you think about? (Be honest! It doesn't matter what.)

'a municipal rubbish dump'
'a hospital waiting room'
'Ancient ruins' 'war torned'

Did you like it /think it "worked"? Why (not)?

yes we all like it + think it works well.

How did you interpret the round, hanging orb?

sun | moon

Did you think the costumes complemented the set or were they "saying" something else?

They complimented the set well but one of our part thought it reminded of China.

What did the costumes and the type of bodies wearing them remind you of?

The Gladiators.

Any other comments.

What was the tree supposed to be?

I thought the set was well balanced + interesting particularly the moon which I liked to scrawl together.

The red 'flag' too blood interesting.

THANK YOU SO MUCH.

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Re. **Troilus and Cressida**

Do you expect set and costumes to give you a clear idea of where and when a play is placed? If not, what do you hope for in a design?

I think they should help you imagine what it was like when it was written.

What does the set remind you of/ make you think about? (Be honest! It doesn't matter what.)

Dead Trees.

Did you like it/think it 'worked?' Why (not)?

Yes

How did you interpret the rond , hanging orb?

The world in conflict

Did you think the costumes complemented the set or were thay "saying" something else?

I faind it offputting seeing so much of their bodies.

What did the costumes and the type of bodies wearing them remind you of?

The Clipendales

Any other comments.

THANK YOU SO MUCH.

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Re. **Troilus and Cressida**

Do you expect set and costumes to give you a clear idea of where and when a play is placed? If not, what do you hope for in a design?

yes, I do.

What does the set remind you of/ make you think about? (Be honest! It doesn't matter what.)

Boring and heavy

Did you like it/think it 'worked?' Why (not)?

No.

How did you interpret the round, hanging orb?

too cumbersome.

Did you think the costumes complemented the set or were thay "saying" something else?

They were the best thing in it

What did the costumes and the type of bodies wearing them remind you of?

Sumo wrestlers, but thinner.

Any other comments. no .

THANK YOU SO MUCH.

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Re. **Troilus and Cressida**

Do you expect set and costumes to give you a clear idea of where and when a play is placed? If not, what do you hope for in a design?

Leave it up to the experience of the designer

What does the set remind you of/ make you think about? (Be honest! It doesn't matter what.)

Sarajevo

Did you like it/think it 'worked?' Why (not)?

Yes because wars and occupation are alike in many ways

How did you interpret the rond , hanging orb?

Time on fire

Did you think the costumes complemented the set or were thay "saying" something else?

They were different but that does it matter.

What did the costumes and the type of bodies wearing them remind you of?

Primitive but noble warriors

Any other comments.

THANK YOU SO MUCH.

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Re. **Troilus and Cressida**

Do you expect set and costumes to give you a clear idea of where and when a play is placed? If not, what do you hope for in a design?

No. The imagination can be released.

What does the set remind you of/ make you think about? (Be honest! It doesn't matter what.)

An adventure playground? Bits put together.

Did you like it/think it 'worked?' Why (not)?

Yes. Because they behaved like spoilt children

How did you interpret the rond , hanging orb?

passing of time

Did you think the costumes complemented the set or were thay "saying" something else?

They seemed to be in a different play almost.

What did the costumes and the type of bodies wearing them remind you of?

Ancient warriors.

Any other comments.

THANK YOU SO MUCH.

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Re. **Troilus and Cressida**

Do you expect set and costumes to give you a clear idea of where and when a play is placed? If not, what do you hope for in a design?

It should appeal to the imagination.

What does the set remind you of/ make you think about? (Be honest! It doesn't matter what.)

ancient city / warroom

Did you like it/think it 'worked?' Why (not)?

yes.

How did you interpret the rond , hanging orb?

Moon and sun combined.

Did you think the costumes complemented the set or were thay "saying" something else?

yes, they complimented the set.

What did the costumes and the type of bodies wearing them remind you of?

classical mediterranean warriors.

Any other comments.

THANK YOU SO MUCH.

Survey

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Re. **Troilus and Cressida**

Do you expect set and costumes to give you a clear idea of where and when a play is placed? If not, what do you hope for in a design?.

Not necessarily - give a feeling of atmosphere or idea of lines with different interpretations

What does the set remind you of/ make you think about? (Be honest! It doesn't matter what.)

The troubles in Ireland / or other contemporary wars as well as Greek wars.

Did you like it /think it "worked"? Why (not)?

Yes, lighting especially effective.

How did you interpret the round, hanging orb?

Sun/Moon

Did you think the costumes complemented the set or were they "saying" something else?

What did the costumes and the type of bodies wearing them remind you of?

?

Any other comments.

THANK YOU SO MUCH.

T
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Re. Troilus and Cressida

Do you expect set and costumes to give you a clear idea of where and when a play is placed? If not, what do you hope for in a design?
Palmer: Costume should, at least
Self: Don't mind. The set should fit production + production should fit text.
What does the set remind you of/ make you think about? (Be honest! It doesn't matter what.)
Palmer Dali paintg.
Self Polish Gothic Church
Did you like it /think it "worked"? Why (not)?
Palmer. Liked the engineering of the wall and perspectives.. (Could use more of it)
Self Scale and space good. Wall not very appropriate.
How did you interpret the round, hanging orb?
Palmer. Pressure of war on all their decisions - Shield image
Self Pendulum — time
Did you think the costumes complemented the set or were they "saying" something else?
Palmer. Gold in Trojan costumes distracting.
Self. Too voluminous.
What did the costumes and the type of bodies wearing them remind you of?
Always limitations of Japanese
Any other comments.
Too much shouting and gesturing.
THANK YOU SO MUCH.

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Re. **Troilus and Cressida**

Do you expect set and costumes to give you a clear idea of where and when a play is placed? If not, what do you hope for in a design?

Yes. Especially when it's in the past

What does the set remind you of/ make you think about? (Be honest! It doesn't matter what.)

Depressing and mundane.

Did you like it/think it 'worked?' Why (not)?

Quite honestly it made the play more boring

How did you interpret the rond , hanging orb?

Sun? I don't know why it was significant

Did you think the costumes complemented the set or were thay "saying" it was something else?

They were very sexy and livened it all up

What did the costumes and the type of bodies wearing them remind you of?

Gym freaks

Any other comments.

THANK YOU SO MUCH.

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Re. **Troilus and Cressida**

Do you expect set and costumes to give you a clear idea of where and when a play is placed? If not, what do you hope for in a design?

Excitement

What does the set remind you of/ make you think about? (Be honest! It doesn't matter what.)

Pornography and graffiti

Did you like it /think it "worked"? Why (not)?

If you stare at it pornographic enough I'd then it dicks

How did you interpret the round, hanging orb?

didn't notice it.

Did you think the costumes complemented the set or were they "saying" something else?

another soft pornography

What did the costumes and the type of bodies wearing them remind you of?

gay bars

Any other comments.

THANK YOU SO MUCH.

Survey

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#

Re. **Troilus and Cressida**

Do you expect set and costumes to give you a clear idea of where and when a play is placed? If not, what do you hope for in a design?

yes

What does the set remind you of/ make you think about? (Be honest! It doesn't matter what.)

Bloody battle scenes.
Troy!

Did you like it /think it "worked"? Why (not)?

Yes, simple effective dramatic
Good lighting to help

How did you interpret the round, hanging orb?

Planet / War

Did you think the costumes complemented the set or were they "saying" something else?

yes

What did the costumes and the type of bodies wearing them remind you of?

Some of ancient town cotton models of early Greek work - frieges. on buildings

Any other comments.

THANK YOU SO MUCH.

To Dallimore. Belfast

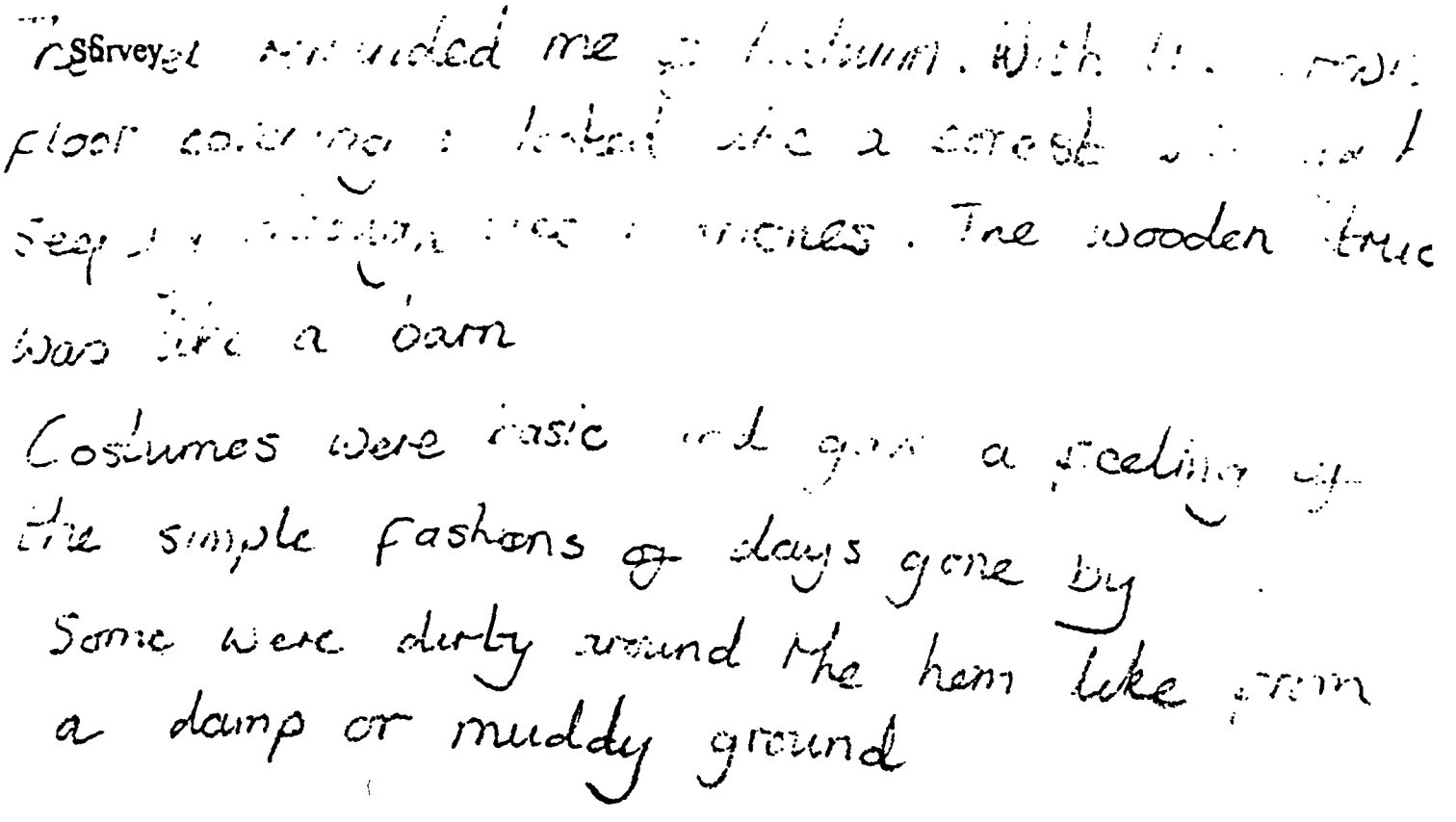
Survey

The Set

Henry VI, my Shakespear.

There was dead foliage on the ground which was covered in dirt and rubbish like the war had been going on for years.

Ashley Harper.



HEREFORD BTEC

[Rewrite]

The set reminded me of Autumn. With the brown floor covering it looked like a forest with light seeping through the branches. The wooden structure was like a barn.

Costumes were basic and gave a feeling of the simple fashions of days gone by Some were dirty around the hem like from a damp or muddy ground.

ANNIE DIBLING

IT REMINDED ME OF

Survey Pigs, Woodlands + truffles

THE DOOR OPENING AT THE TOP OF THE BIG FLAT AT THE BACK REMINDED ME OF AN OLD BARN

Costume REMINDED ME OF THE WEETABIX ADVERT AND LOOKED EXTRAMALY GOOD ALL THE CHARACTERS MADE THEM LOOK FABULEES!

HEREFORD BTEC

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Do you think the Swan Theatre needs theatre design?
Not sure I understand the question but I like it as it is.

Did you consider the design (including props) of **The Cherry Orchard** to be effective? Why/Why not?
Yes - very simple and not distracting from the action.

What were your opinions of the costumes? Do you prefer costume to be in the "correct" period? Why/why not?
I think costume of the correct period helps to understand the play and gives it atmosphere.

Thank you so much. Your answers will be collected at the main door as you exit. Bad luck on me - I don't know anything!

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Do you think the Swan Theatre needs theatre design?
If you mean re-designing, no.

Did you consider the design (including props) of **The Cherry Orchard** to be effective? Why/Why not?

What were your opinions of the costumes? Do you prefer costume to be in the "correct" period? Why/why not?
I do prefer costume in the "correct" period as that is what the write had in mind.

Thank you so much. Your answers will be collected at the main door as you exit.

THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS REQUIRED BY A RESEARCH STUDENT WRITING HER PhD ON CONTEMPORARY SET DESIGN. SHE IS VERY GRATEFUL FOR YOUR CO-OPERATION.

Do you think the Swan Theatre needs theatre design?

I think it a perfectly udequate theatre for traditional and contampory performances.

Did you consider the design (including props) of **The Cherry Orchard** to be effective? Why/Why not? It is a natualistic play. but symbolic.

What were your opinions of the costumes? Do you prefer costume to be in the "correct" period? Why/why not?

yes

Thank you so much. Your answers will be collected at the main door as you exit.

THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS REQUIRED BY A RESEARCH STUDENT WRITING HER PhD ON CONTEMPORARY SET DESIGN. SHE IS VERY GRATEFUL FOR YOUR CO-OPERATION.

Do you think the Swan Theatre needs theatre design?

No.

Did you consider the design (including props) of **The Cherry Orchard** to be effective? Why/Why not?

Yes. Very Simple but effective.

What were your opinions of the costumes? Do you prefer costume to be in the "correct" period? Why/why not?

Yes. It sets the play in it's proper context.

Thank you so much. Your answers will be collected at the main door as you exit.

APPENDIX C

ILLUSTRATIONS

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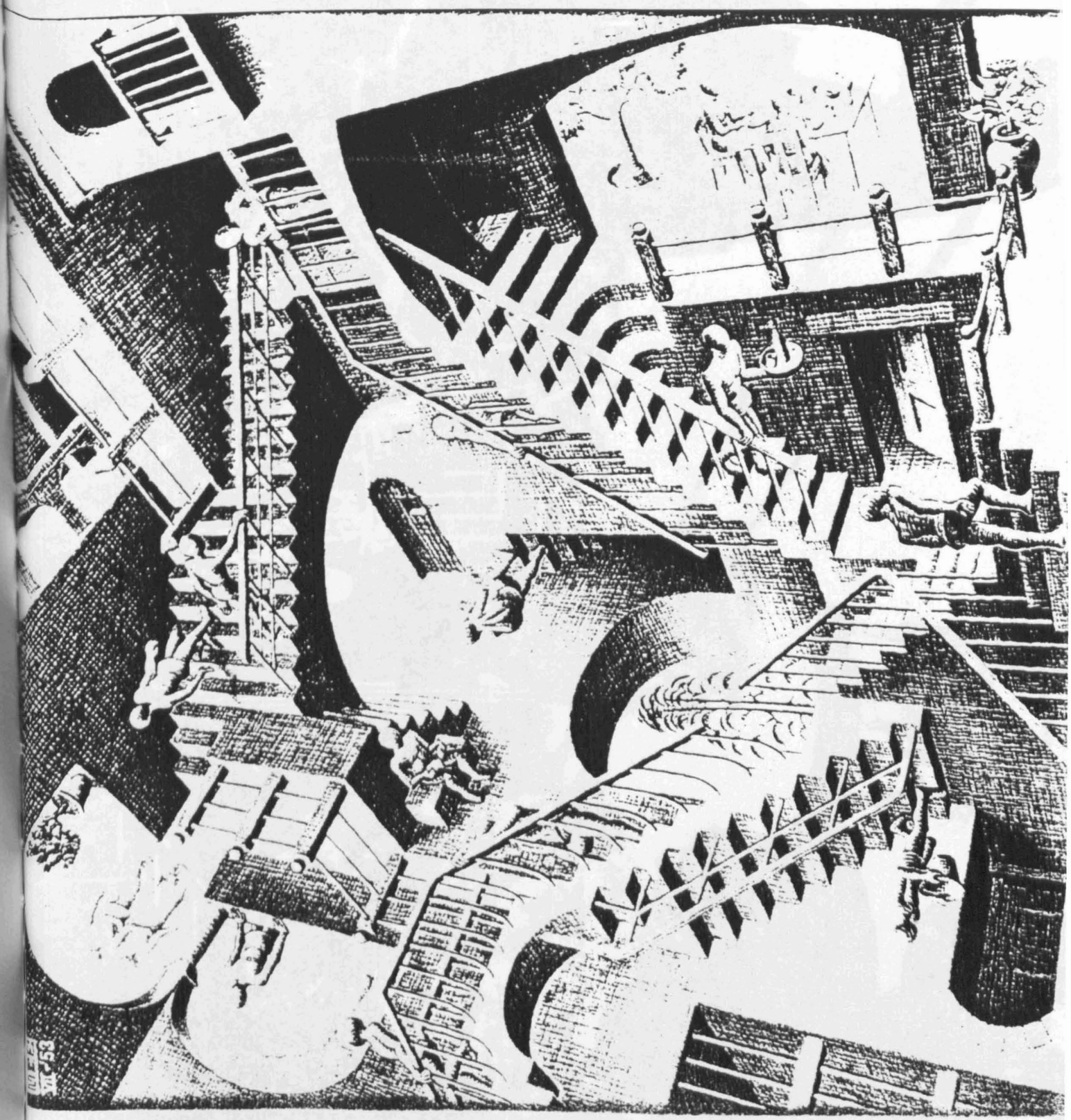
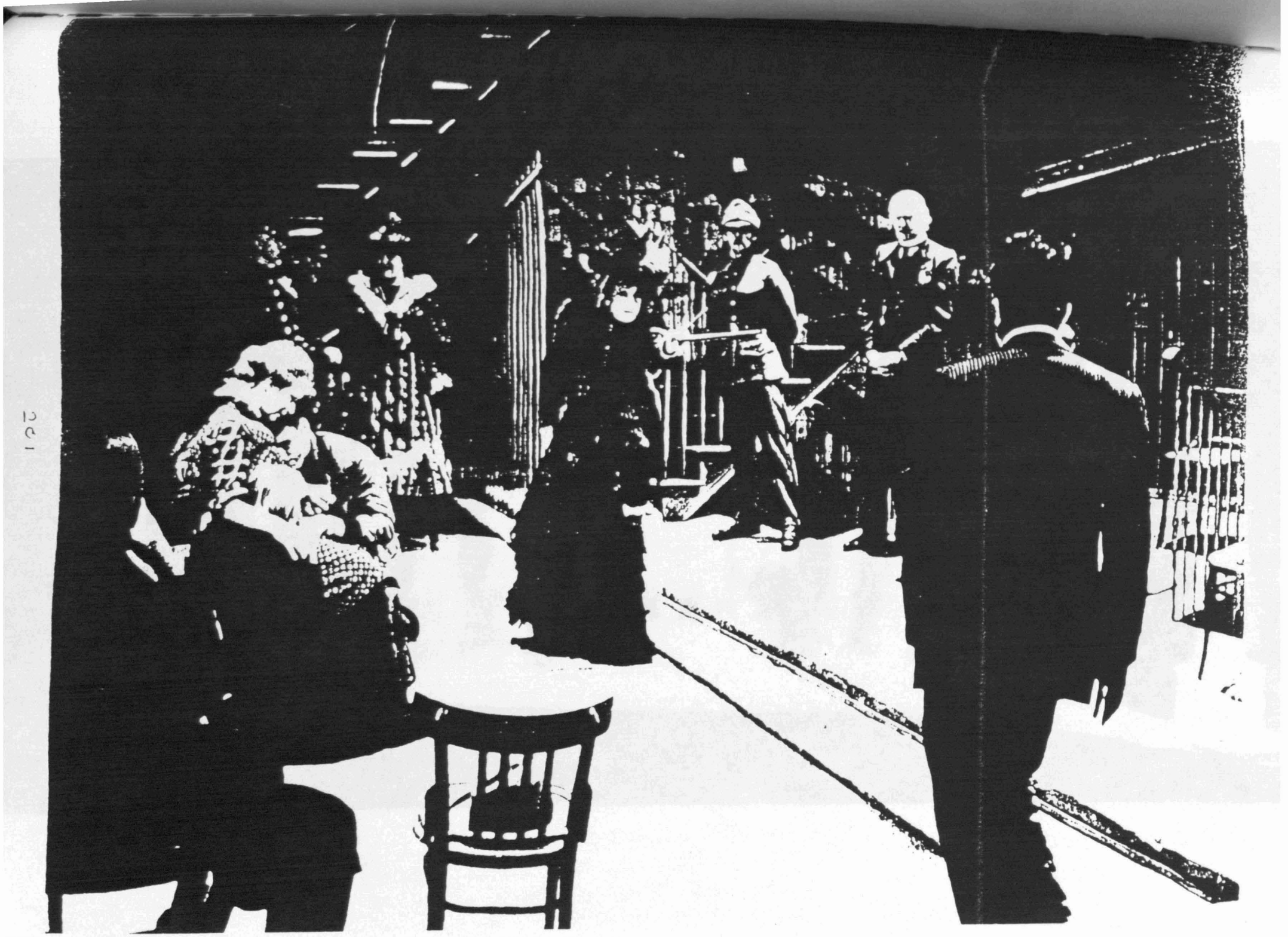
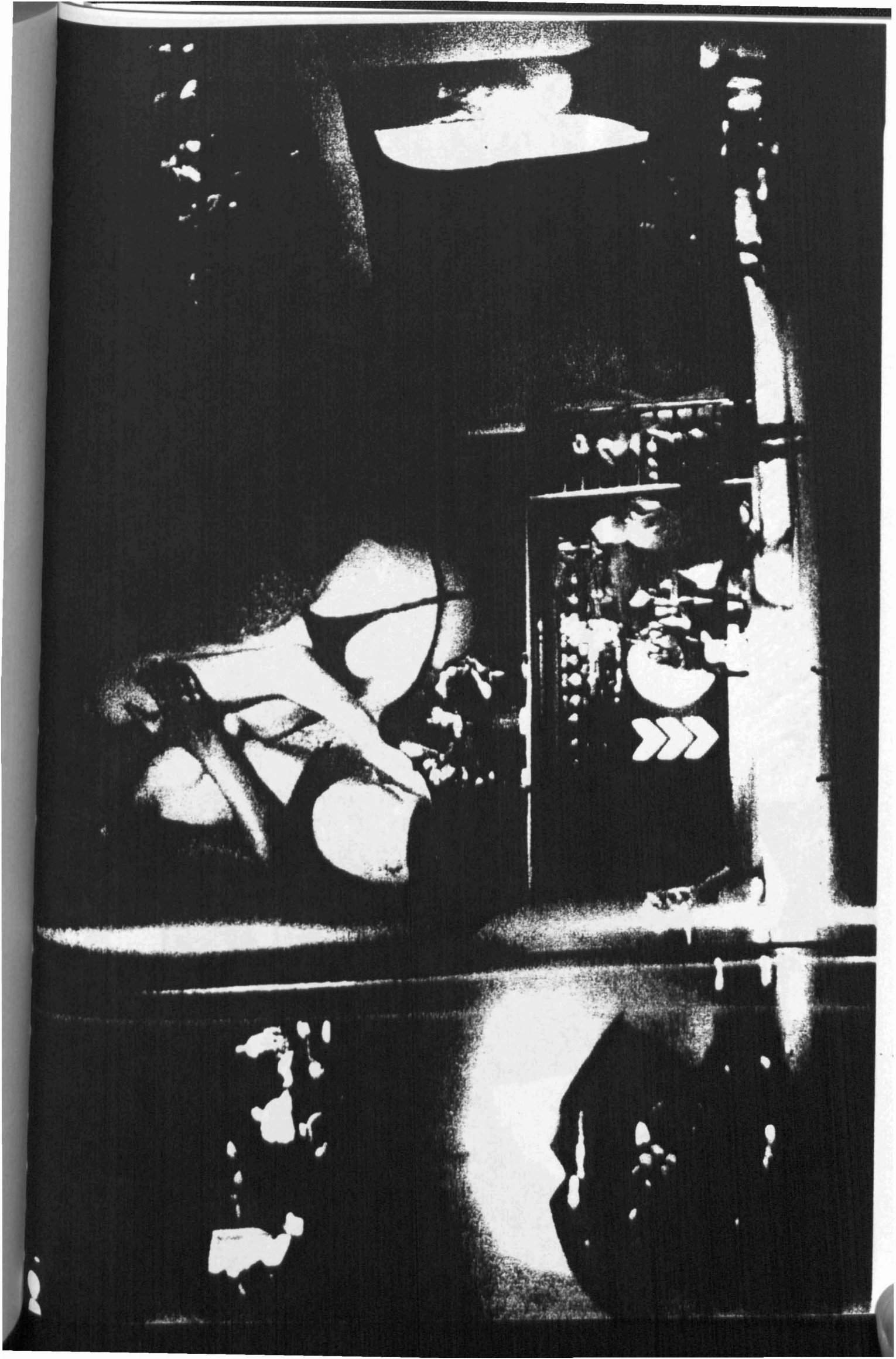
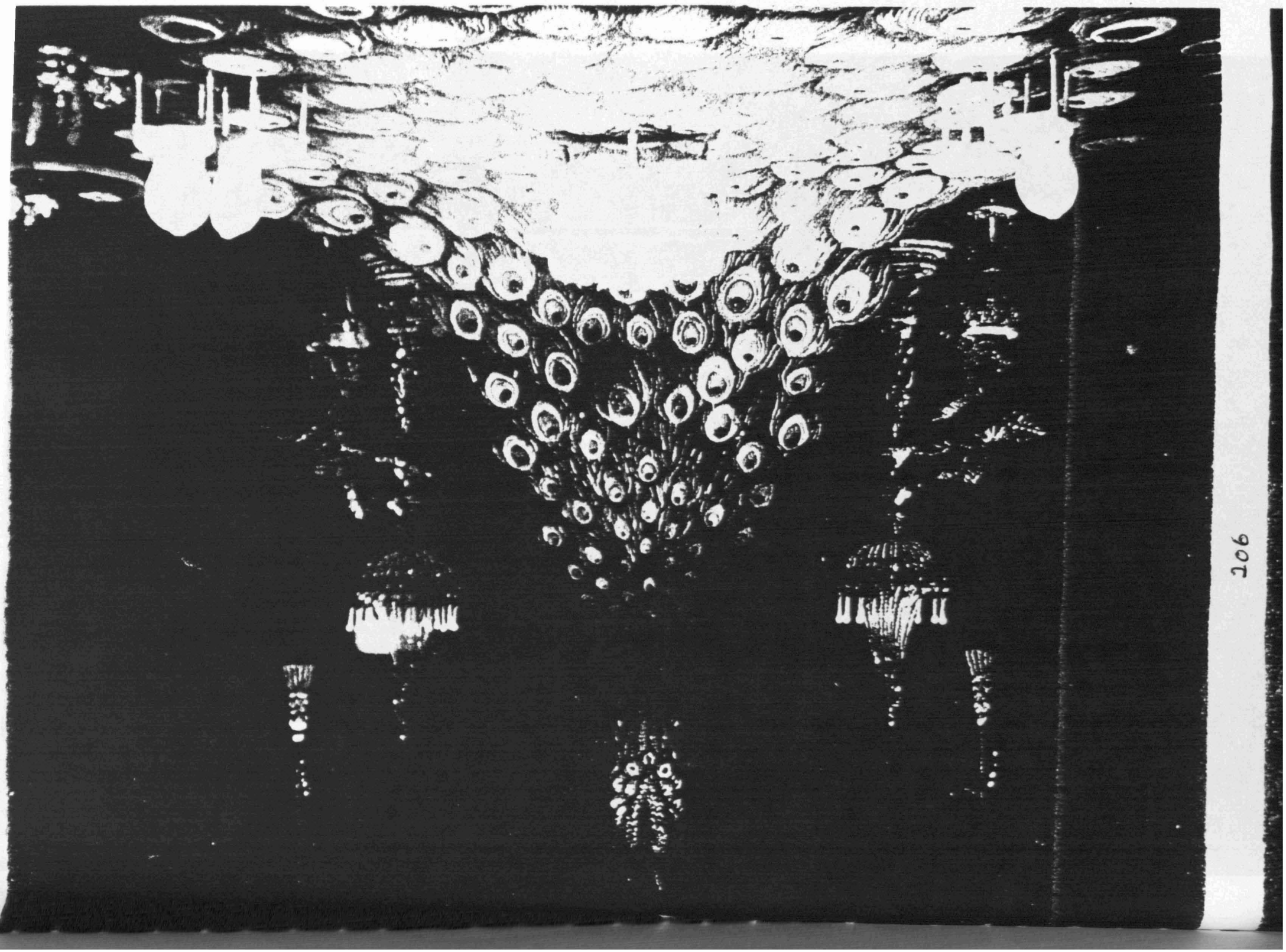
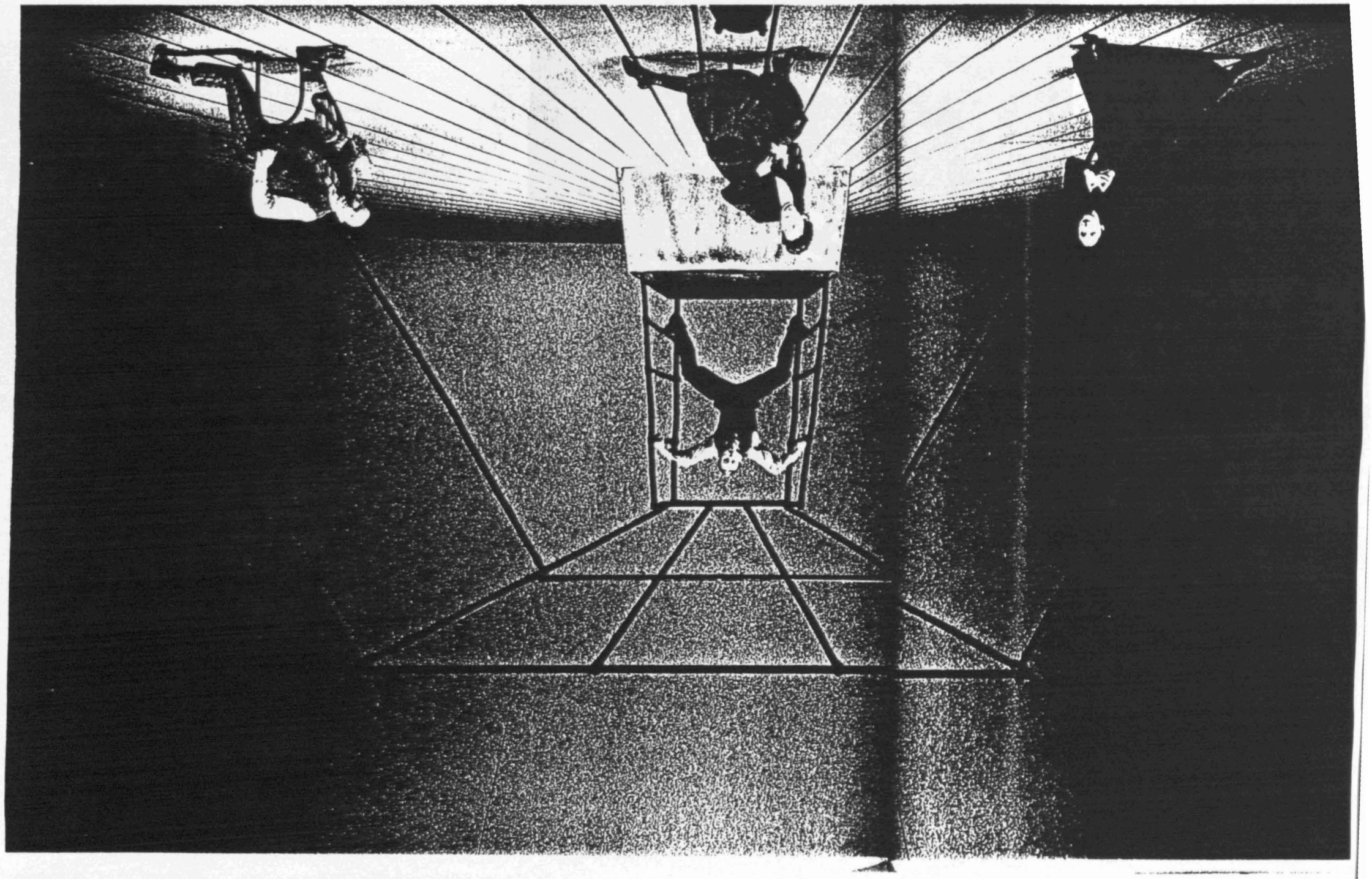
[1] Escher, M. **The Graphic Work of M.C. Escher.** Pan Books, London and Sydney,1972
[2] Production photograph.
[3] **Make Space!** S.B.T.D.1994.p.58
[4] Goodwin p.81
[5] Goodwin, p136
[6] Make Space! p.50
[7] ibid p.48
[8] Berkoff, Steven. **The Theatre of Steven Berkoff.** London. Methuen, 1992. pp.13-35
[9] Ptáčková, Vera. **A Mirror of World Theatre – Prague Quadrennial 1967-1991.**Prague Theatre Institute, 1995 pp.231,101,220
[10] ibid pp.218,226,230











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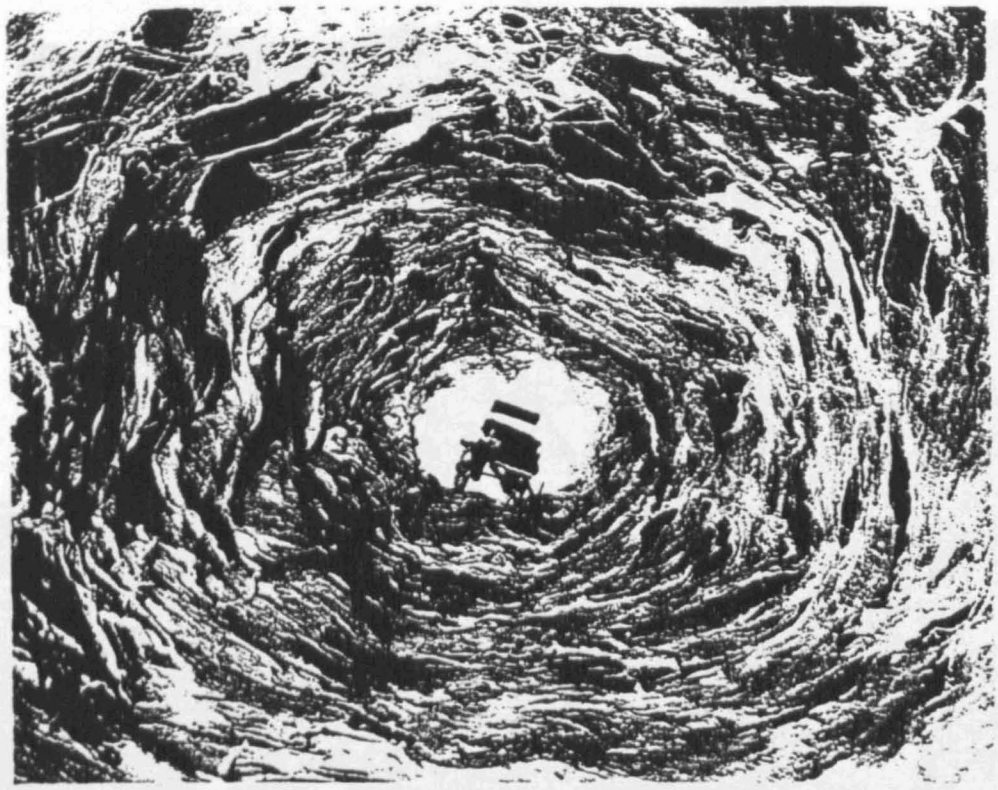
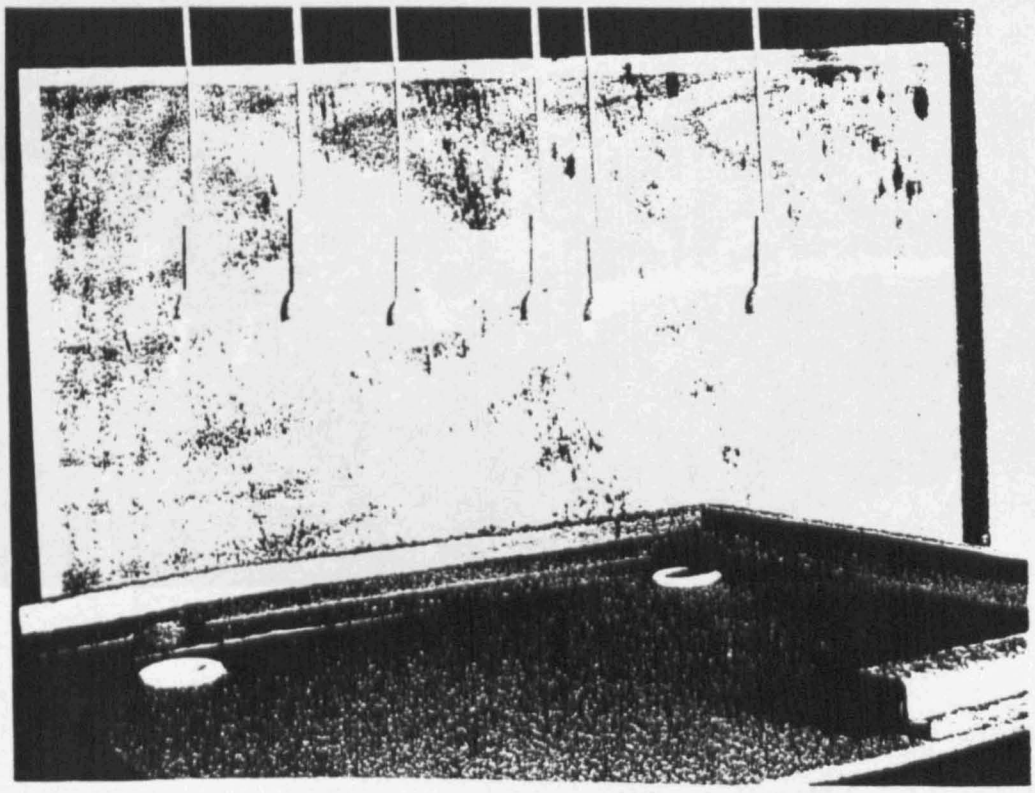
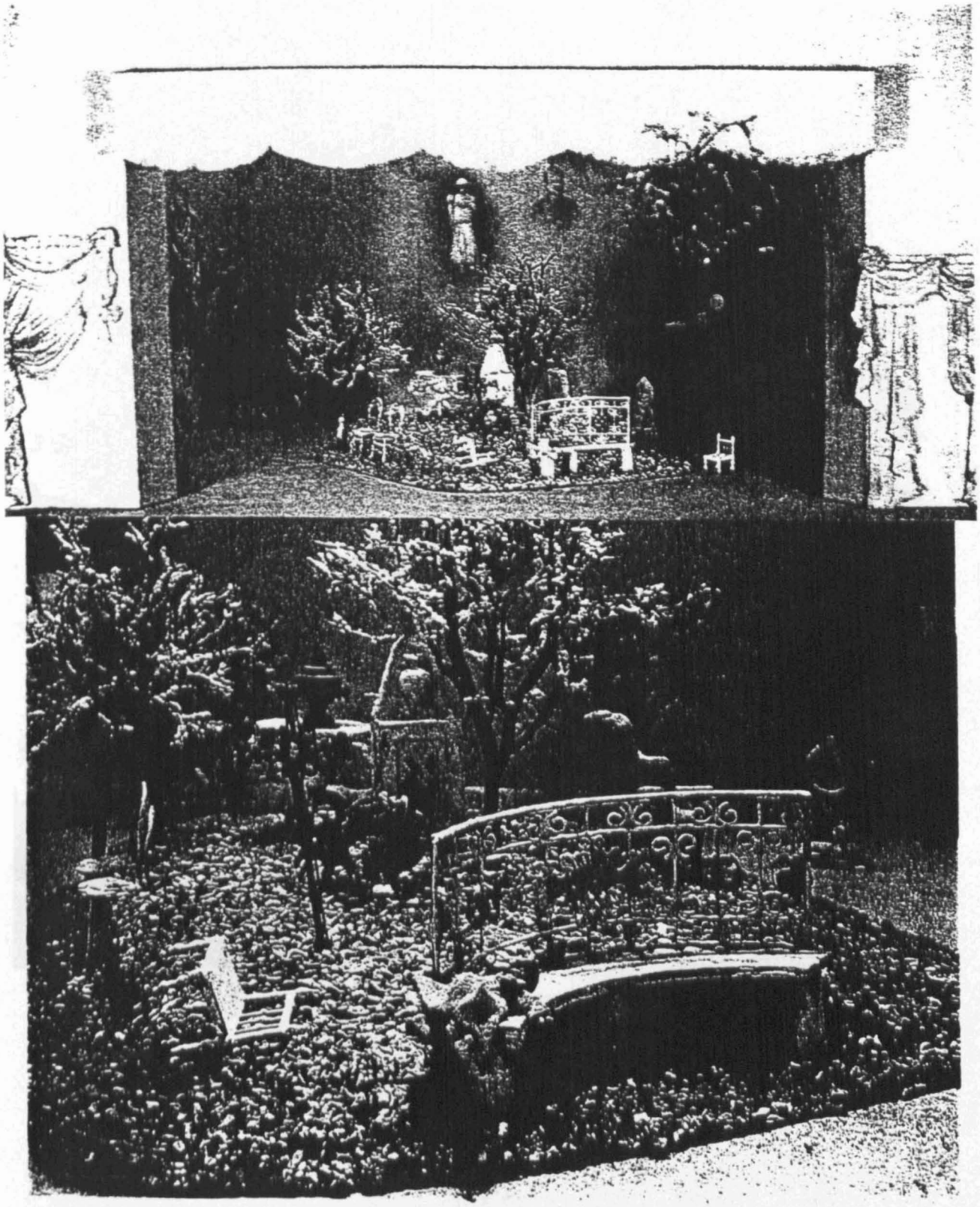
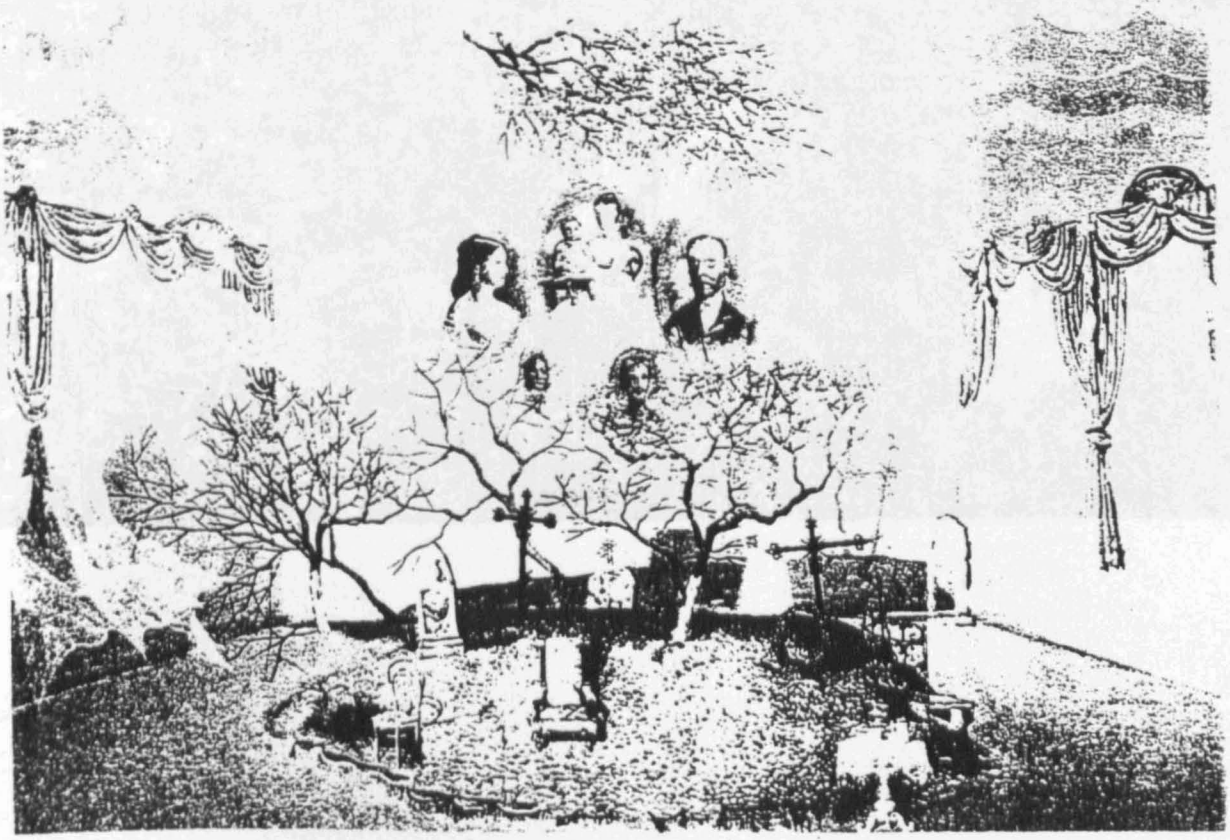


Romulus FENES A. P. Chekhov: The Cherry Orchard, 1965

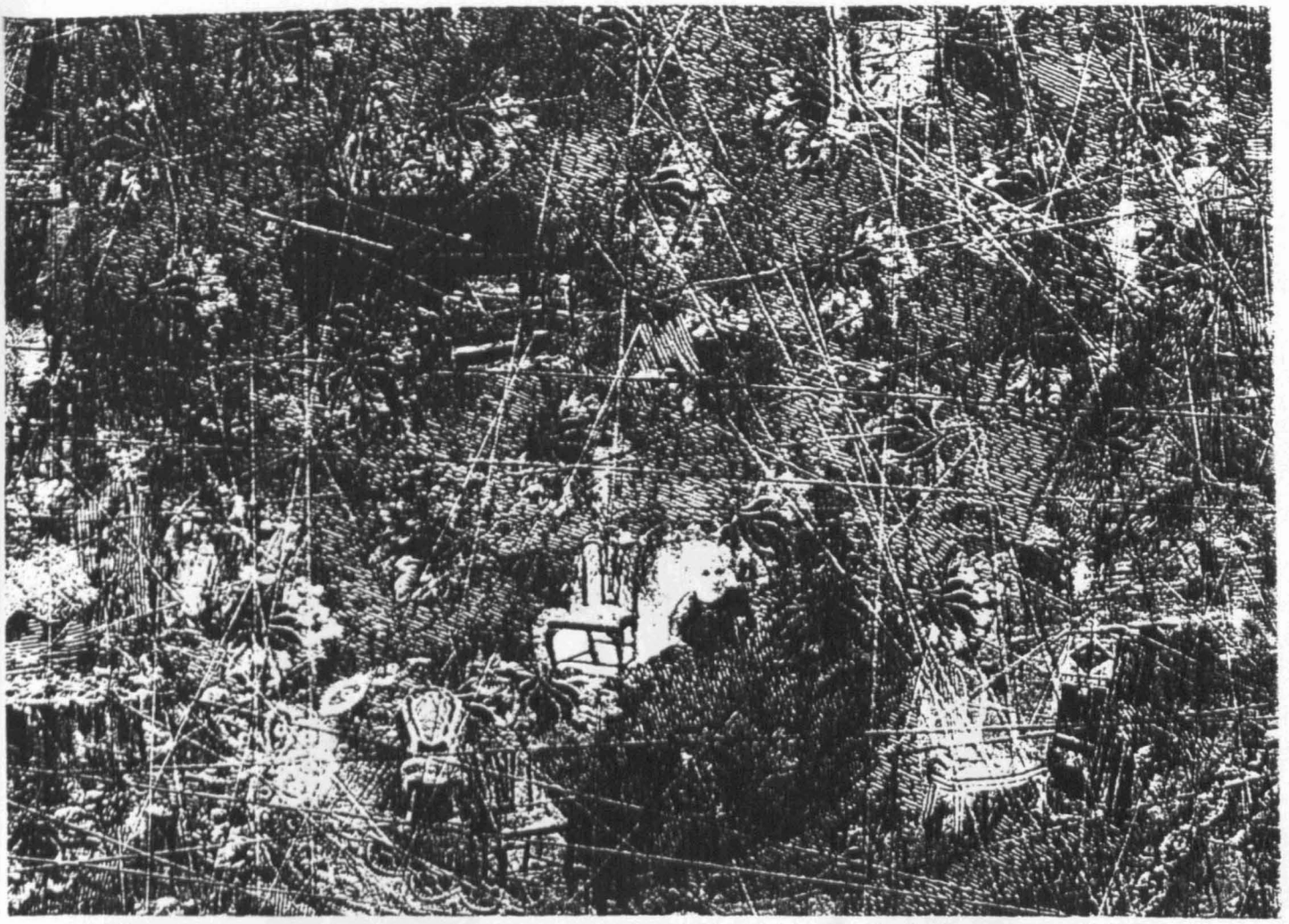


Ilie Gligor BLEKW of IX A. P. Chekhov: The Cherry Orchard, 1965

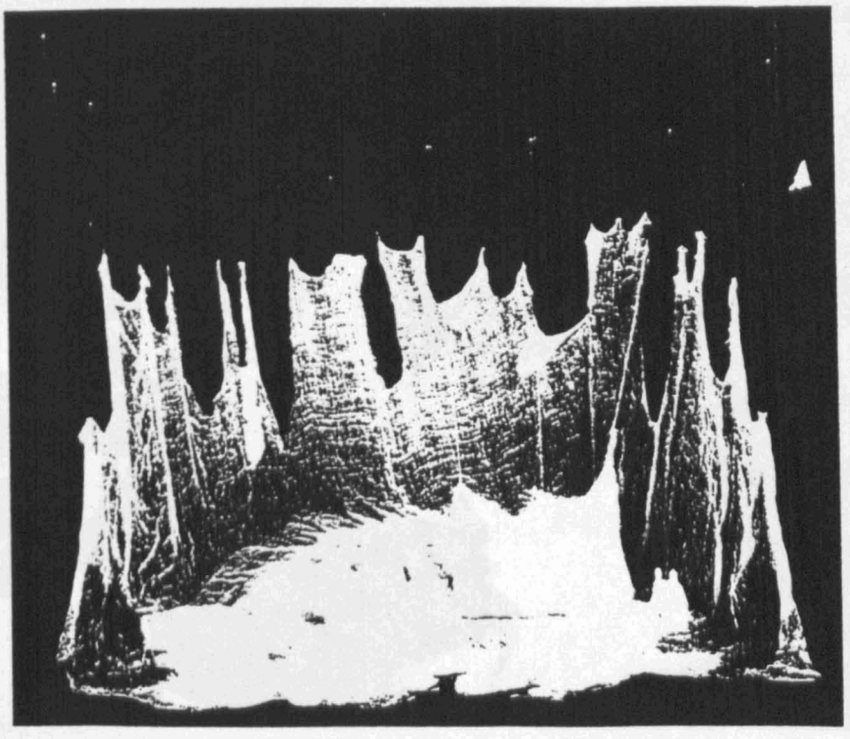




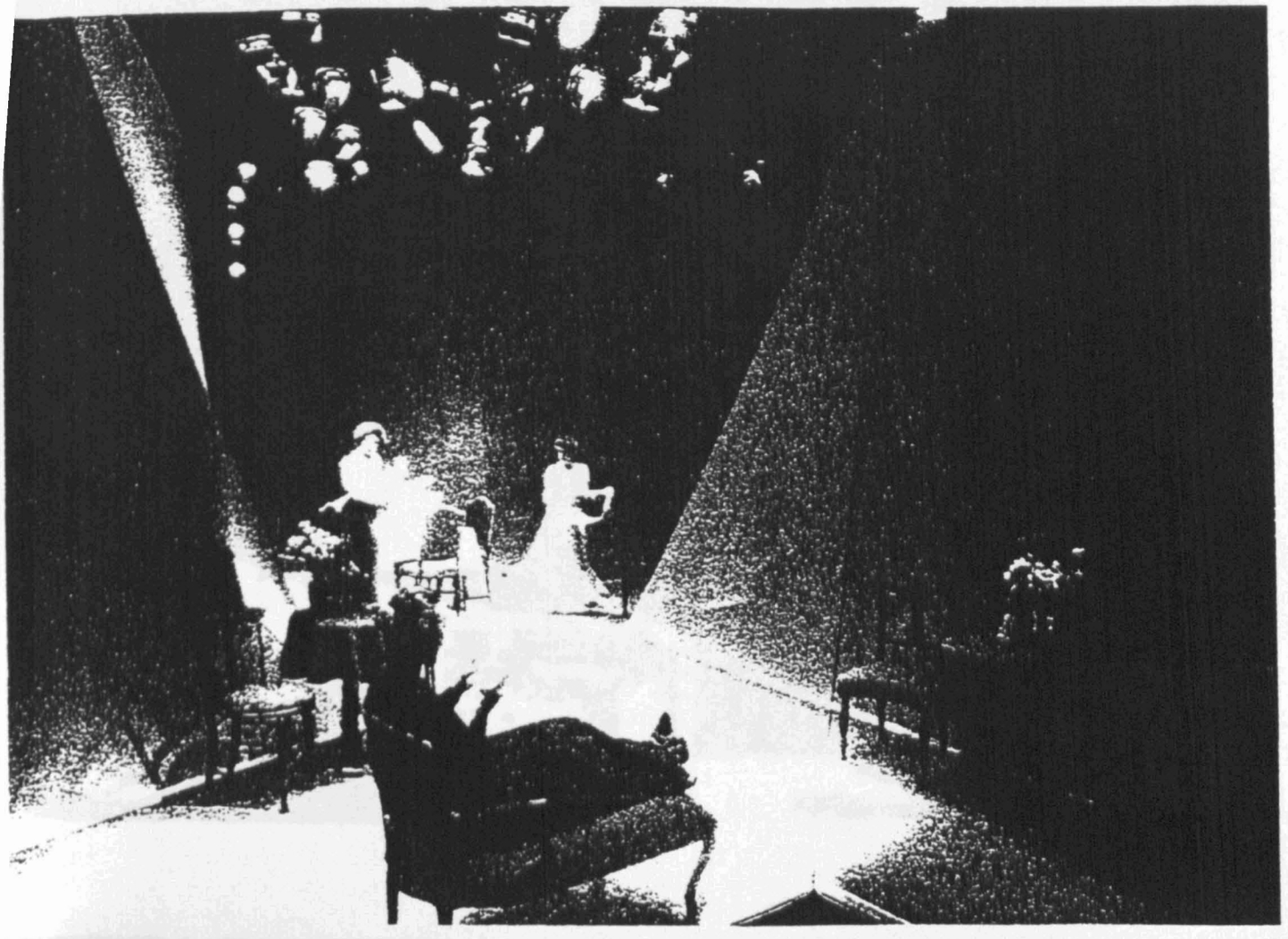
Valery LEVENTAL A. P. Chekhov: The Cherry Orchard. 1980

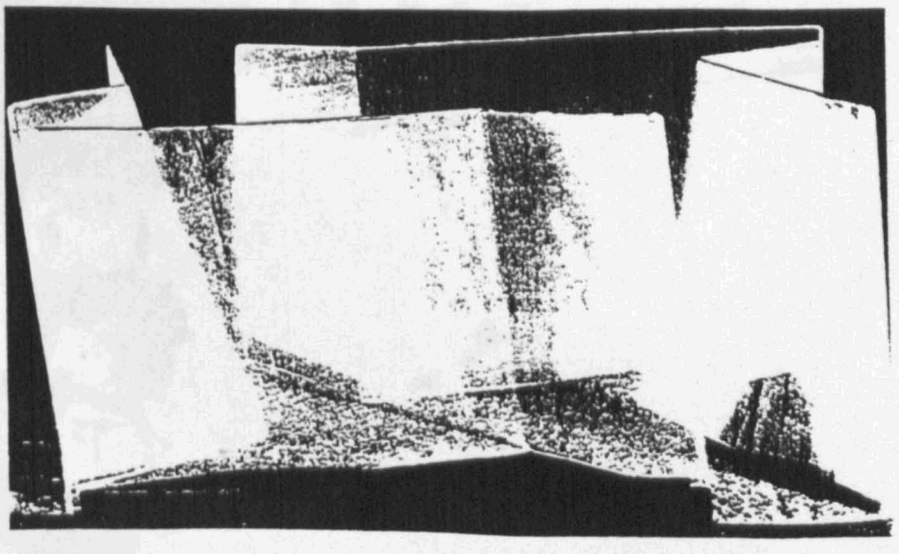


Mart KITAYEV A. P. Chekhov. The Three Sisters. 1974



Vladimír VŠETEČKA A. P. Chekhov's The Three Sisters. 1983





Peg. PERNA - P. Occhio e Ho Two Noses - Casa

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